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WILLIAM AND WILLIAMINA

By Frances R. Sterrett

William and Williamina

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"You are all the family I've ever had or ever want."

[PAGE 129]

WILLIAM
AND
WILLIAMINA

BY

FRANCES R. STERRETT

AUTHOR OF "MARY ROSE OF MIFFLIN,"
"UP THE ROAD WITH SALLIE,"
"THE JAM GIRL."

ILLUSTRATED BY
MAGINEL WRIGHT ENRIGHT

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK LONDON
1917

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BECAUSE SHE LOVES AND
UNDERSTANDS ALL WILLIAMINAS,
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO

MARGARET HAHN STERRETT

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"You are all the family I've ever had or ever want" ..... *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"Are you hurt—or ill?" she asked a little timidly and a lot curiously 2

"Is it possible, Bill, that you have never seen a circus poster?" 64

"What do you know about Henry the Eighth?" he asked with a chuckle 108

"Oh, William!" she cried, holding out her rain-wet hands 138

"William," she murmured sleepily, "William, darling" 208

"You can't guess what I've brought you!" Williamina cried exultingly 262

He gave a funny little cry and his arms closed around her 344

WILLIAM AND WILLIAMINA

CHAPTER I

A CREEPY little feeling ran down Williamina's ten-year-old spine as she surveyed the Knox cottage from the top of the Knox high board fence. The cottage had been closed ever since old Peter Knox had been carried out of it in a long black box. Since then no one but Williamina had shown any interest in it nor in the few acres of land which old Peter Knox had used for a market garden.

No one had tried to do anything with the garden, and it grieved Williamina to see how unkempt and neglected the former neat beds were. But suddenly her eyes popped wide open, for on the steps of the shabby cottage she saw a grown-up girl, not as grown-up as Mrs. Macartney, Dave's mother, but far more grown-up than Williamina. The grown-up girl sat on the very lowest step, and her face was hidden in her hands.

"Hello!" called Williamina, in a very friendly voice. "I'm Williamina." And she waited to hear who the grown-up girl was.

But the grown-up girl never answered. In-

stead she seemed to bury her face deeper in her hands. Williamina had an uncomfortable feeling that she might be crying, and she jumped off the fence to run and stand beside her.

"Are you hurt—or ill?" she asked a little timidly and a lot curiously. She could not understand why this grown-up girl should sit on the steps of old Peter Knox's house and hide her face in her hands unless she were hurt or ill.

Slowly Helen Spafford took her fingers from her face until she had uncovered her eyes and could see a little girl, whose yellow head seemed framed by her black hair ribbons. Her pink gingham frock had a jagged tear near the hem, but her back was as straight as a yard measure, and she held her yellow head high, her little pointed chin thrust forward as she regarded Helen out of awed questioning eyes.

Williamina gave a sigh of relief as she looked at Helen and decided that she did not seem ill nor hurt although her eyes were red and swollen, and her face was as white as white. Her eyebrows and lashes, even her eyes, were as black as her hair, which was as black as her shabby little suit. Even her expression was black as she frowned at Williamina.

"Where did you come from?" she asked, and her voice sounded black.

"Are you hurt—or ill?" she asked a little timidly and a lot curiously.

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Williamina had never seen such a black and white girl, and she teetered back and forth on her heels, as she stared at her. "Do you mean now or in the very beginning?" she asked, ignoring the blackness in the voice and face, for Williamina seldom took offence. "I was walking up there," with a nod toward the high board fence, "when I saw you. But before that William found me in the bulrushes, just like Pharaoh's daughter found Moses."

"What do you mean, you ridiculous mite?" yawned Helen. She sat up straighter and her face lost some of its blackness. "And who is William?"

Williamina's small brows knit together in a frown as she tried to put in words just what William was. "Well," she began slowly, "if there ever had been fairy godfathers William would have been one. Perhaps he is the very first fairy godfather that ever was made." She smiled radiantly. It was enchanting to think that William might be the pioneer fairy godfather. "He's my family," she went on, "and I'm his family. If it hadn't been for him I'd have been dead and in my grave for nine years. My, but I'm glad he did find me! But that's why I love William so much and why usually I try to do what he tells me. You see, it was this way." She settled her-

self on the lower step beside Helen and crossed her small legs comfortably.

"Once upon a time," she began in the time-honored way which has never been rivaled by any story teller, no matter how much of a genius for realism he had, "there was a splendid gentleman. He lived by the river down there," she pointed toward a big pine tree which towered in the distance. "He lived all alone with the Christmas trees, for the doctor had told him he was very ill and would die if he didn't live in the country where there wasn't anything but pure air. So he made a cabin among the pine trees and lived there by himself for years and years. Of course, he was very lonely and he used to wish he was dead and buried. But you can't get much just by wishing, you know. You have to pay for what you get, always, William says, and while he wanted to be dead and buried he didn't want to pay by really leaving this beautiful world as you have to do when you die. And one night there was a terrible storm. The thunder thundered and the lightning lightened and the rain came down in gallons.

"The next day this kind gentleman went out to see if the storm had hurt any of his Christmas trees, and as he walked up the river bank wishing he was dead and buried," Williamina un-

crossed her small legs and jumped to her feet, "he saw an old rowboat in among the bulrushes. He'd never seen that old rowboat there before, and he went closer and closer and there, right on the bottom of it, was a pink blanket all wrapped up. There wasn't anything else, not even an oar. At first William wasn't going to look at the pink blanket for it didn't belong to him, and it wasn't any of his business, and then he had a hunch—do you know what a hunch is?" Helen nodded and Williamina went on. "Well, William had one that very minute, and he picked up the pink blanket and took out a pin and found"—she hesitated a second and then announced with great fervor—"*me!* And that's where I came from in the beginning, and since then William has been my family, and I've been his family, and we've been happy ever after."

Helen looked at her oddly. "And didn't this William ever find out where you came from, nor anything about your real family?"

Williamina shook her head until her hair ribbons flopped wildly. "There wasn't anything to find out. There wasn't any name on the boat, nor on me, and I was much too little to talk. I couldn't say a single word. I didn't even know when my birthday was, so when I was old enough William said I could choose one. I wanted the longest

day in the year, but Mrs. Macartney said that was piggish, and I should take the shortest day. So William tore two pieces of paper off one of Mrs. Macartney's chicken bills, a short piece for the shortest day and a long piece for the longest day, and Mrs. Macartney put her hands behind her back, and I said which one. And it was the shortest. My, how I cried until William told me I could have his birthday too, June the first, because he hadn't any more use for it. Grown people haven't, you know, and so now I have a winter birthday and a summer one. That's even better than just one, even if it is the longest day in the year, isn't it?" She was vastly pleased at their solution of the birthday problem and grinned before she went on with the story of her short life. "William sent out a herald—" she stopped and flushed as she corrected herself, "I mean he asked and asked but nobody knew anything of the little girl baby who had been lost, and so there wasn't anything to learn!" She announced that fact with great triumph to clear William of any blame.

"You poor little thing!" Helen's hand reached out to pat "the poor little thing" sympathetically, but Williamina wriggled away.

"I'm not a poor little thing!" she insisted in-

dignantly and with her head very much in the air. "I'm much better off than I might be, for nobody knows who my father was nor my mother. I can think they were kings and queens if I want to, William said so. He read it to me out of a book only it wasn't put just that way. It was something about hitching your wagon to a star, and William explained what that could mean so I could do it. I was to think that my father and mother were just the very grandest people in the whole world and then I'd have to act like the grandest little girl should. He said it wasn't any good to have the blood of kings in you if you didn't act like kings. When I'm good he calls me a princess, and when I'm bad he says I'm a beggar maid. Sometimes I almost wish my father had been only a common man. It would be a lot easier for me. And then most times I'm glad to think he wasn't for it's such fun to imagine that some day a herald in blue and silver will come along blowing his golden trumpet and asking for the Princess Rosalind, who was stolen from her cradle. It makes me different from every other little girl in the world," she said complacently, "to have been found in the bulrushes like Moses. My, when I get to Heaven I hope Moses'll remember when he was found so we can talk it over together. I'll know Moses by his

horns and his whiskers, but how do you suppose he'll know me?"

Helen laughed for the first time in many days. "By your nose," she said, touching that feature lightly. "As soon as he sees your pug nose Moses will say, 'That's Williamina, I must ask her if she remembers the night she slept among the bulrushes.' "

Williamina jumped up and down in delight. "He will, won't he? I expect we'll be the greatest friends. Oh dear, there are so many people to make friends with in this world and the next it doesn't seem as if there ever would be time enough, although William told me my life line told him I'm going to live to be ninety-three years old." She said it with great awe and offered her grimy paw with its communicative life line as evidence.

"Friends!" A bit of a sneer lifted Helen's upper lip. "I haven't found so many friends in this world. I don't know about the next."

Before Williamina could answer there came a cry from the far side of the high board fence.

"Williamina! Williamina!" It was a man's deep voice. "Williamina, if you don't come before I count ten I'll fry you in boiling oil for my supper!"

Williamina giggled with joy. "That's Wil-

liam," she whispered, her lips very close to Helen's ear. "And he won't really fry me in boiling oil. That's just his way of telling me to hurry. Let's hide!" And she caught Helen's hand and drew her down behind the great clump of bridal wreath which made its home beside old Mr. Knox's front steps.

"Fee-fi-fo-fum," growled William, his voice growing deeper and deeper as he came nearer and nearer. "I'll grind your bones to make my bread!"

CHAPTER II

FIVE—six—" counted William, and Williamina snuggled closer to Helen, for well as she knew that William would never grind her bones to make his bread, it did send shivery little thrills from her black hair ribbons to the toes of her canvas sneakers to hear him count so solemnly and in such a deep, deep voice—"eight—nine——"

Helen had no desire to be found by a William nor any other man, crouched down behind a straggling bridal wreath, and as she tried to free herself from Williamina's clutching fingers she stumbled and fell forward, sprawling at William's feet as he shouted triumphantly:

"I see the tail of your pink gingham, Bill. No use playing the ostrich with me." And then he saw on the grass in front of him a black suit instead of a pink gingham, and he said in a very different voice: "Hello!"

Helen stumbled to her feet, ignoring William's outstretched helpful hand, as he stood before her. All she had seen of William at first were his feet,

and then miles and miles of khaki clad legs, and then several miles of blue flannel shirt. There seemed to be no end to the khaki and to the blue flannel, although there really was, for William was only as tall as the average man. When she reached William's head, Helen found that it was like the head of any man with the usual two eyes, one nose and a mouth. But there was a kindly light in William's blue eyes and a friendly twist to William's mouth which made his face very different from the face of the average man. You had to like William when you looked into his eyes and met his friendly smile. You couldn't help it. At least Helen Spafford couldn't help it, try as she would, and she stopped knitting her brows into a frown to match her black suit. She even condescended to twist her lips into a sort of a smile, like William's, as she stood on her two feet again and looked at him with a quick breath.

"She's a new friend, William!" Williamina popped out of the other side of the bridal wreath to announce in an eager breathless voice. "I found her on the steps, right there!" she pointed to the exact spot, "not ten minutes ago. I've told her all about you and me."

"That's good." The corners of William's mouth twisted higher. "You save me a lot, Bill, by having such a ready tongue. I'd have to do

considerable talking if it wasn't for you. Did you think to tell our new friend that my name is Kirwin as well as William?"

"No, I didn't, but she knows it now. And my name is Kirwin, too, as well as William's, isn't it, William? William gives me everything, you see, even his name. When I was little, oh, years and years ago, he thought he would call me Evelyn after a friend, a lady friend it was, I think, but I wouldn't have it, would I, William? I wouldn't have any name but his, so he just had to call me Williamina. But he has never been sorry, have you, William? Now," she turned to Helen, "you know our names, don't you?" And she waited politely for Helen to tell them what her name was.

Helen was most obliging. "And my name is Helen Spa..rd," she said slowly, looking from one William to the other in a dazed sort of a way as if she could not quite understand who they were nor where they had come from.

"I think that's pretty, don't you, William?" Williamina admired it immensely. "Her name's like Helen of Troy, isn't it? Only she's black and white and you told me that Helen of Troy was all gold. Are you visiting here?" When Williamina wished to know anything she did not hesitate to ask, and she was consumed with curiosity

to know why the black and white Helen was sitting on old Mr. Knox's doorstep.

"No," Helen spoke reluctantly. "I was thinking of living here."

"Oh, goody!" Williamina clapped her hands. "Won't it be nice, William, to have a neighbor again? And a lady neighbor! Old Mr. Knox was splendid; he let me pull a radish whenever I wanted to so long as I didn't take a good one, but he was a man neighbor and a man neighbor isn't the same as a lady neighbor. Are you going to raise lettuces and radishes the way Mr. Knox did?"

"I thought I should." She turned to William as if he might understand better than Williamina. "Mr. Knox was a distant cousin of my mother's, and he left this place to me. When I read the lawyer's letter I thought I was a millionaire, but when I came out here today and saw this, why—why—" she laughed ruefully, "I didn't feel so rich. I'm a school teacher," she went on a little distantly as if she realized that it was none of William's concern if she was. "And I hate school teaching. I'm tired trying to put some knowledge into cabbage heads. I thought I'd rather try to raise them."

"Can anybody do that?" Williamina caught William's hand to make sure he heard her. "Can

anybody put knowledge into cabbage heads? And would they sell so well if they had knowledge in them? Mr. Knox used to say the only head of lettuce that should sell was the sound one. He told Ole that hundreds of times. I heard him. Didn't he know about knowledge?"

William pulled the lock of hair which had slipped away from the black ribbon to tease Williamina's right eye. "He knows all about it now if he didn't then. Market gardening isn't play," he told Helen.

"Neither is school teaching," she answered sadly. "I hate it! And everything about it! I hate the dingy schoolrooms, I hate the restless, noisy, undisciplined boys and girls. They make me wish I had lived in the good old days of Herod. I hate the principals and supervisors. Oh, I hate it all," she repeated hotly. "All but the monthly check, and it never was as large as it should have been. I hate people!" she finished abruptly.

Both William and Williamina were silent for quite sixty seconds. Williamina stared at Helen with horror and with a deep gladness in her own small heart that she had not lived in the days of Herod, while an odd little smile played around the corners of William's mouth, as if he found something very amusing in Helen's declara-

tion that she hated everything and everybody.

It was Williamina, of course, who spoke first. Williamina might occasionally be horrified but she was seldom silent.

"Did you live alone with your school teaching? Didn't you have any family?" She never met anyone but she wanted to know at once about his family. Families had a huge attraction to familyless Williamina.

"I did not," gloomed Helen. "I lived alone in one room, kitchenette and bath. And I hated it worse than I did the school teaching."

Williamina drew a deep sigh. "You didn't seem to be very happy, did you? Why did you stay in your one room, kitchenette and bath and in your schoolroom when you hated it so. I never should."

"There wasn't anything else to do." Helen almost snapped the words from her discontented mouth. "Jane Austen was exactly right when she said unmarried women have a dreadful tendency to be poor." And she sighed as if she wished Jane Austen had not been right.

"Then why didn't you get married?" demanded Williamina promptly. If there had been any way out of Helen's world of hate why hadn't Helen taken it?

"Why didn't—" Helen stopped suddenly and

then began again with a sort of subdued fury that must have been for William, for Williamina would never in the world have understood. "Marriage!" The word seemed to burn her lips. "Where would a poor school teacher find a man to marry? The milkman, the iceman, the clerks in the store, the traffic policeman are the only men I ever had a chance to speak to. I used to be afraid to open the door for the milkman," she laughed unpleasantly, "for fear I'd ask him to run away with me. Life on a dairy farm even seemed pleasanter than in the prison of a schoolroom."

"Wasn't your milkman married?" asked Williamina, while William shook a puzzled head. "Ours is. He has a wife and five children, two of them are twins and one has red hair. If you come here to live you needn't ever be afraid to open the door for him."

Helen started to speak and then thought better of the impulse. Her white face turned into a pink one as she said impulsively: "What a fool I am! But I've hated it so I had to tell some one. I'd have said the same thing to anybody. You see," she went on in a confidential manner which drew Williamina closer, "I'm disappointed. I thought this legacy from old Cousin Peter was going to change everything for me. I imagined

it was a neat artistic little cottage in a pretty well-kept garden, in which every plant grew greenbacks and silver. And this is what I find!" She waved a scornful hand toward the neglected garden which once really had grown greenbacks and silver. "It's enough to make a girl bitter to have her rosy anticipations turned into blue reality."

"Mr. Knox made a very good thing out of this garden," William told her cheerily. He was enjoying the conversation immensely. Helen was the first girl of a younger generation he had seen. He had read about the present day feminine unrest—goodness knows he had to, or not read at all—but this was the first time he had met it face to face. The girls he had known in the long ago days before he was exiled had not thought with their tongues. They often must have been dissatisfied with what life gave them but they did not say so to every pair of ears they met, he thought as he looked at Helen. "Of course he worked hard but he made a good living."

"Everybody's got to work to get things," Williamina broke in helpfully. "You should know that. I'm only ten, but I've known it for years. William told me long ago that anyone in this world can have what he wants, but he's got to pay for it. And the trouble is that most people don't want to pay. It's cheating to get things for noth-

ing. You have to give if you want to get, don't you, William? I don't mind paying. I want so much that William says my hand is always out. And it is. But I give, always. Don't I, William? You have to. Don't you remember Snow White and the dwarfs? If she hadn't given to them they wouldn't have given to her. And the Frog Prince? And King Richard of the Lion-heart? He gave to his minstrel boy, and his minstrel boy gave to him. He gave freedom, the very best of all. And there were the Pilgrim Fathers and the Indians, only sometimes the Indians forgot. I think I want more than anyone else in the world so I'll have to give more." She sighed at the amount she would have to give.

"What do you give?" asked Helen, although she didn't care very much to hear. Her own affairs occupied her thoughts, as they had ever since her mother's death had left her alone in the world just after her graduation from college, until her horizon seemed to be bounded by her own slim shadow.

Williamina colored rosily and wriggled. "There are different things," she murmured. "It doesn't always have to be gold or precious jewels, does it, William? You can use what you have. That's much the best way."

"H-m." It didn't sound very interesting to

Helen and she swung the conversation back to herself, which was always interesting to her. "Now, I ask you what can I do with this?" And again a scornful hand was waved toward the garden in which old Peter Knox had spent his life. "Now that I've seen it I wish I hadn't been in such a hurry to send my resignation to the school board."

"I take it," remarked William lazily, "that you know little of the culture of radishes and lettuce."

"Nothing, ab-so-lute-ly nothing. They weren't in our course of study. I think they were the only things left out. Don't tell me I can learn, for that means work, and I don't want to work. I've worked all my life and I'm tired of it. I want to be a lily of the field. For two cents I'd sell the place and buy myself a roadster and run it into a ditch."

"I have two cents," announced Williamina importantly. "But I shan't buy old Mr. Knox's garden if you are only going to get into a ditch. Would you, William?"

"I should not. And Miss Spafford wouldn't sell old Mr. Knox's garden for two cents. She spoke, my dear Bill, in what among some people is known as hyperbole, while others call it talking through their hat."

"Oh!" Williamina eyed Helen's hat. It was

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"I should not. And Miss Spafford wouldn't sell old Mr. Knox's garden for two cents. She spoke, my dear Bill, in what among some people is known as hyperbole, while others call it talking through their hat."

"Oh!" Williamina eyed Helen's hat. It was

small and black and had one glisteny quill thrust through it. She did not exactly understand why Helen should wish to talk through it but, for a wonder, she did not ask.

Helen looked as if she were offended and then hurt and then she laughed. And she had a very pretty laugh when she wished it to be pretty. "I fancy I was," she admitted frankly. "I'm a perfect fool, but it isn't altogether my fault. Usually I'm a tongue-tied old spinster. The exhilaration of this Mississippi river air has untied my tongue. Oh, well, what's the use!" She shrugged her shoulders. "I can take summer boarders, I suppose. One more disappointment is nothing. I'm used to them."

"You didn't plan to live here alone?" ventured William.

"I did. Just that. I'm not afraid."

"There isn't anything for her to be afraid of," burst forth Williamina. "You've told me there wasn't, William, a million times. And we're just up there and Mrs. Macartney and Dave are just beyond us and old Danny Simms and down below is Mr. Brewer. Everybody will try to keep you from being lonely, Miss Spafford. And I'll give you a dog. The yellow dog that followed me home last week, William. You'd like a dog, wouldn't you, Miss Spafford? He was

lame but William and I made him well and now he's quite ready to give away. Maybe," her voice dropped to a shy whisper, "he will turn into a prince. Animals often do in the fairy stories, especially if they are ugly. And the yellow dog is ugly." She glanced over her shoulder as if she feared the yellow dog might overhear and be hurt at her opinion of his looks.

Helen's nose tilted. "That's very good of you," she said, but her voice did not sound as if she really thought that it was good of Williamina to give her a yellow dog that might turn into a prince. "But I couldn't think of taking your pet."

"He isn't my pet. He really isn't my dog. He's just one of the things I give."

William shouted joyfully. "Williamina's right when she says she is the greatest little giver that ever was. She collects all the strays, animal and human, and hands them on. It isn't safe for anyone to come to our shack unless he wants a dog or a cat or a rabbit or a chicken."

"You told me yourself, William Kirwin, that people are better when they have a responsibility, and when they come to our house without any why, of course, I do the best I can." Williamina's cheeks were pink as she made her hurried explanation. "And I haven't any rabbits now. I only have four dogs and a cat with five teeny

kittens and a rooster and four hens and thirteen little chickens and a nanny-goat. That's all I have."

"Merry! I should think that was enough." Helen was quite impressed at the number of Williamina's responsibilities.

Williamina nodded her head. "I've had twice as many, haven't I, William? Would you like to see them? It isn't far. And if you find you don't like the yellow dog you can change him for a white one or a black and white one. I'll let you have your choice of everything but the malty kitten. I'm saving that for the postman. He said to me he had never had a kitten in all the years of his life, and he's 'most as old as William."

"You may be thankful she isn't offering you the nanny-goat, Miss Spaford. You might as well make your choice. It's all the same to Williamina, but there is a difference in dogs," William advised kindly.

"She could come to supper," whispered Williamina in his ear. "It's almost time and she said she was tired of herself. Mrs. Macartney promised me a special cake if I'd leave the swans and come home. Sometimes I just have to tag around with them because maybe they are under a spell like the wild geese, you know. I have a feeling down here," she touched her small chest,

"that some day I'll pull out their tail feathers if they won't let me catch them after the sun goes down to see if they really are handsome princes and beautiful princesses with crowns on their heads, instead of common white swans and gray geese. And Danny Simms brought in ten black bass." She went on with her menu before William could forbid her to follow the feeling in her small chest. "And Louis said that was far too many for our family. She's just moved in. I don't suppose she has any supper."

"Yes, she has," Helen told her quickly. "I got bread and things at the store over by the trolley. I have all I want to eat."

"That's a splendid plan, Bill," William said, as if Helen had never told how well provisioned she was. "And we might ask Mrs. Macartney and Dave to help eat the black bass and meet their new neighbor."

"Oh, goody!" Williamina jumped to her feet. "I'll run and tell them. And you come as soon as you can," to Helen. "It's the very next house, in among the Christmas trees. You can't miss it. And, William, you'd better go and tell Louis to cook all the fish."

William and Williamina went away together, and as they left the high board fence behind them Williamina asked curiously:

kittens and a rooster and four hens and thirteen little chickens and a nanny-goat. That's all I have."

"Mercy! I should think that was enough." Helen was quite impressed at the number of Williamina's responsibilities.

Williamina tossed her head. "I've had twice as many, haven't I, William? Would you like to see them? It isn't far. And if you find you don't like the yellow dog you can change him for a white one or a black and white one. I'll let you have your choice of everything but the malty kitten. I'm saving that for the postman. He told me he had never had a kitten in all the years of his life, and he's 'most as old as William."

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William and Williamina went away together, and as they left the high board fence behind them Williamina asked curiously:

"Why is she so black, William?"

"I expect it is because old Mr. Knox has gone to Heaven."

Williamina thought that over while they took six steps. "If old Mr. Knox had gone to Hell would she have been in red?" she asked eagerly. "And is that why she hates everything? What's the matter with her, William, that she didn't like to teach school?"

William had stopped to light his pipe, and he puffed twice before he answered: "I expect she wants a man," he said between two more puffs. "Most women, school teachers and others, want a man."

"Do they?" Williamina's eyes opened wide. She had never heard that before. "Whatever would she want a man for, William?"

"Well," William's pipe was drawing satisfactorily now, and he reached down one hand for five of Williamina's fingers, "He could help her grow lettuces and radishes, you know."

CHAPTER III

HELEN had no intention of taking supper with William and Williamina. She had bought bread and butter, a few slices of boiled ham, some eggs and coffee at the store, and that was enough to make a very good meal for any hungry school teacher. The dingy pantry in old Mr. Knox's house was not entirely empty. There was some sugar, a little flour and salt and pepper enough for a regiment, she thought when she saw the tin cans. She would do very well and she would not begin her new life by placing herself under obligations to anyone. She was not sure that she cared to establish friendly relations so hurriedly with a khaki-clad man, interesting as he promised to be, and a grimy little girl, who had been found among the bulrushes. She wasn't a snob, she told herself, emphatically, but she was as good as anyone, and a girl who lived by herself could not be too careful. She would not make friends in haste and cut them at leisure. But she reckoned without Williamina, who made a new friend every time she met a new person.

Half an hour after William and Williamina had said goodby, Helen heard Williamina's voice warm in argument.

"That's all right, Dave Macartney," she was saying shrilly. "But you aren't so beautiful yourself that you need find fault with other people's looks. I never said this dog was a Venus nor an Apollo, because he isn't. But he is good, and goodness counts for something. And he's pleasant. I've never had a cross word from him since I found him over on the county road, and that was seven days and a half ago. If Miss Spafford doesn't like him she doesn't need to keep him, but I'm not going to throw away a perfectly good dog just because you say he is a bad color and has too long legs."

"I didn't ask you to throw him away!" Dave's voice was as heated as Williamina's. "But you were talking as if he were a prize pup, and he isn't. He's just a common dog and not much of a present for anyone."

"That would depend upon how much a person wanted a dog," Williamina answered loftily. "Some people don't care so much for outward show as for inside goodness, and I believe Miss Spafford is one of that kind." Behind the dusty green blinds Miss Spafford frowned. She knew she was not one of that kind at all. "And any-

way, Dave Macartney, she can do her own refusing. You needn't do it for her."

"I only told you, Williamina," began long-suffering Dave, who had had arguments enough with Williamina to know how this one would end, for Williamina would not listen any longer than she pleased, and she did not please now.

"Miss Spafford!" she called eagerly. "Oh, Miss Spafford! Here's your dog, and supper'll be ready when we get home. Mrs. Macartney was glad to come, although her cousin is here from Waloo, and she had biscuits in the oven. She's going to bring them with her, and Louis is going to give us honey because I asked him to. I love hot biscuits and honey, don't you?"

Perhaps it was the hot biscuits, perhaps it was the honey, perhaps it was the eager hospitality in Williamina's voice which made Helen change her mind. Instead of saying coldly that she could not come, as she had planned to say, she called cheerily: "I'll be there in a minute, Williamina."

And it really was not much more than sixty seconds before she came out to find Williamina with a pleasant smile and in a fresh frock, and Dave, also newly washed and brushed. A yellow avalanche, which might have been a young calf if it had not been a pup, tumbled against Helen.

"Mercy me, Williamina!" she cried, trying to keep her feet. "What is this?"

"That's your dog," beamed Williamina, peacock proud. "He hasn't many manners yet, but you can teach him. I expect you can teach him a lot. He's such a baby. He's young now, but he's old enough to be company for you. Dave—this is Dave Macartney, Miss Spafford—thought you'd rather have a handsome dog, but anyone will take a handsome dog. Don't you think you'll like him? He hasn't a friend in the world but me."

Helen found it difficult to make promises while the almost friendless dog advanced with such a firm determination to obtain another friend.

"My, but I'm glad that's settled," Williamina went on happily. "I've worried over that dog. I couldn't think of a single solitary person who would take him, but now he has a good home and you have pleasant company, Miss Spafford, so I needn't bother another minute about either of you. Are you ready? If we don't go at once we'll be late for the biscuits."

Helen looked dubiously at her pleasant companion. She had never seen a dog she liked the looks of less, but Williamina had slipped her fingers into her hand and there was something in Williamina's manner that made Helen unwilling to

say what she thought. She allowed herself to be led out of old Mr. Knox's gate and down the road to a grove of pine trees through which led a fascinating little path that seemed to call: "Come in. Come in."

"We turn in here. Doesn't it make you think of 'the house in the woods'?" Williamina turned an eager face toward Helen. "These are our Christmas trees. We have a new one every year. See," she pointed to a tall young pine and showed Helen a date cut in the bark. "That was the one we had last year. We hang it with things for the birds and the squirrels, you know, and they love it." She patted the slim trunk with loving fingers herself. "Sometimes when Brother Wind is playing here they make the most beautiful music," she said in a hushed voice. "Of course I know they aren't really bewitched," she confessed in a way that told Helen she really thought they were, "but I like to think they are. And, anyway, William said we didn't actually know they aren't. There are so many things we don't actually know, aren't there? It makes it very difficult. William and I believe that trees and everything have something like a soul. That's what makes each different from the other, you know. We're all alive, anyway," with a final embrace for the slim young pine tree, which might

be an enchanted princess. "And when you're alive 'most anything can happen. If you look quick," she caught Helen's hand, "you can see our shack." A slim finger told Helen where it was. "Doesn't it look like a great big mushroom?" she giggled.

It did, indeed, look somewhat like a gigantic mushroom as it sprawled beside the river. The sunbeams shingled its sides with silver and touched each ripple in the river with a silver fleck also.

"The little hump this way is the kitchen," Williamina explained as they walked toward the mushroom in its tangle of gay summer flowers. "And that's Louis in the window." She waved a hand at the wrinkled little Frenchman, who waved a saucepan at her. "I gave him to William, didn't I, Dave? I found him sitting by the road, all ragged and dirty, and he hadn't had anything to eat for days. I had run away. I used to do that a lot, and William had to tie me to a tree if he wanted to know where I was. I brought Louis right home with me, and we found William trying to make pancakes. Louis gave a funny little squeal, a French squeal, and snatched the bowl from him, and before we could say Jack Robinson he had some new batter made and a frying pan on the stove. And when the pan was

hot he put in some batter, and when it was brown on one side he took the pan and tossed the cake into the air and it came down on the other side in the pan. It did! I saw him! It was a miracle. And from that day to this he's been our cook. He planted our flowers and vegetables, too. I was glad to give him to William, and now William wouldn't trade him for Aladdin's lamp. He told me so. Louis lives in the hump. That was all there was to our shack at first, but it's grown just as I've grown. Isn't it funny that even houses don't stand still? They grow bigger or littler just like everything else."

"It's too bad your pup won't grow littler, Miss Spafford," grinned Dave.

"We are all through talking about dogs, Dave Macartney," Williamina reminded him with great dignity. "Here we are. Come right in, Miss Spafford. We are awfully glad to have you. We don't have company half as often as I'd like. William doesn't care for it." She spoke as if company might be ice cream and William's dislike to a continuous portion was something beyond human comprehension. "Here's William now," she added happily.

William had come to the wide steps to welcome them, and he did not look as if he disliked company. He had changed his flannel and khaki for

a rather shabby blue serge and a silk shirt and looked more like the men Helen had seen in Waloo. His face wore a very hospitable expression as he shook hands with his guest and stood aside for her to enter.

As she crossed the threshold of William's home, Helen gave an involuntary gasp and stood still. It was not a bit what she expected it would be. There was but one enormous room and it was not at all the sort of room which she would ever have associated with a pair of shabby khaki legs and a blue flannel shirt. There were many French windows which opened on a spacious porch that ran around the two sides toward the river. On one side the porch overhung the bank and its foundations ran down ten feet to the shore to make a home for William's boats and fishing paraphernalia and a place for William's workshop. A huge fireplace was at the opposite end of the big living room, beneath the stairs that rambled leisurely up to the second floor. A shabby old couch was drawn exactly at the right distance in front of the fireplace and back of it was a long table with a lamp and a litter of magazines, books, papers, tobacco jars, cards and dolls. A bookcase ran around the room between the windows and on one side of the fireplace and where the shelves were not filled with books they were cram-

med with toys and tools. Above the bookcases at one end were reproductions of Carpaccio's jolly pictures of St. George and the Dragon and above other shelves hung Hobbema's Avenue of Trees, a copy of the St. Christopher in the Doge's palace in Venice, a couple of old portraits, and an excellent print of Giotto's tower with its pendant cathedral. A small piano was in one corner and not far away a victrola. A big desk, always open and showing pigeonholes crammed with papers, more tables and chairs, all big and comfortable man chairs, completed the furnishings. There were no curtains, no rugs on the hardwood floor, but there was an air of space that was very restful.

Before she had time to see all of this Helen had shaken hands with Mrs. Macartney, a plump little woman, whom the Lord had meant to be a cheerful person, but who had let circumstances pull down the corners of her mouth and draw an anxious frown across her white forehead.

For thirty years Mrs. Macartney had had some one to think for her and about her and then Mr. Macartney had decided, with the suddenness of a thunderbolt on a July day, that there was absolutely no sense in a man slaving at the law, which he hated, when all of his life he had wanted to raise chickens. Without consulting his wife—for why should a man bother the woman he wanted

to preserve from all annoyance?—he had locked his office door one night, and the next day he had bought a few acres of land fifteen miles from Mifflin on the river bank. He sold his office furniture and bought hens and eggs and incubators and books on chicken raising, but before he had marketed a broiler he caught cold and died, leaving Mrs. Macartney with Dave, the chickens and a good-sized mortgage.

Mrs. Macartney had carried them all to William, but William was modern enough to believe that the Lord gave women brains for exactly the same reason that he gave them to men, and he made a lot of trouble for himself by teaching Mrs. Macartney to think for herself. He had succeeded after a fashion, for in the eight years since Mr. Macartney had died Mrs. Macartney had rebelliously developed her chicken farm so that she made a good living for herself and Dave, and she had even paid off the mortgage, which at one time had threatened to eat her and the chickens up.

"You have grown into a real financier," William told her with pride for himself as well as for her.

"I don't want to be a financier," she answered crossly. "I'd much rather let some one else have

the responsibility of earning my money. I'll only hold on until Dave can take it."

"That won't be until Dave is through college," William said firmly. "You can't ruin Dave's future by your own dislike to responsibility."

And poor Mrs. Macartney had sighed and frowned. "No, I suppose not. But the most successful men in this country were thrown on the world when they were mere boys."

"They succeeded in spite of, not because of their poverty," William insisted. "You've worked up a splendid business, Mrs. Macartney. I should think you'd like it."

"Like it? Like raising chickens?" She eyed him with surprise. "But if it wasn't chickens I suppose it would be something else, clerking in a store or going out sewing by the day. That might be worse," she admitted reluctantly.

She looked so much more the helpless shielded woman than the active manager of a paying chicken farm, as she shook hands with Helen, that the latter never suspected that Mrs. Macartney had done anything but what she pleased in all of her born days.

"How do you do, Miss Spafford," she had said in the soft gentle voice which William had given to Williamina as a pattern. "This is my cousin, Miss Marietta White."

Marietta White was as tall and slim as her cousin was short and plump, and Marietta White's brown eyes were like dull coals in her rather pale face. She had auburn hair that waved back from her forehead in a most alluring manner. There was a vitality, an alertness about Marietta, even in repose, which told anyone who looked at her that she would far rather be an active worker in the world than any petted drone. She had already thrown herself into life with such zest that she had burned all the pretty color from her face and the luster from her hair which was more red than brown. She was only a shadow of what the real Marietta White should have been. She gave Helen five listless fingers and then, as William seemed dilatory and Louis hovered fussily about the doorway, she led the way to the side porch where the supper table was placed. The porch faced west so that William and Williamina could have a different sunset every night for supper.

"I hope you don't mind eating outside." It was Mrs. Macartney who was apologetic. "But William doesn't believe in doing anything indoors when the thermometer is above zero. I suppose it is something for him to let us have a roof over our heads at all and a floor for our feet. I often ask him what he thinks houses are for."

"To store our possessions in," laughed William,

"and for shelter. Much as I like the outdoors I prefer a roof in a storm."

"We have two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs and two sleeping porches," Williamina explained as she took the chair at the head of the table, which she had occupied ever since she had been able to support her small spine unaided. "We eat outdoors and we sleep outdoors. That's the best way, William says."

"And what William says is gospel to this child." Mrs. Macartney spoke as if she wished that William's words were not Williamina's gospel.

Williamina turned to her quickly. "It is to you, too, and to everybody. William's always right, and he always knows!" Her cheeks were two pink roses as she voiced her creed.

"That's a reputation to have and to live up to," chuckled William, in no way abashed by such open admiration. "If Mr. Brewer were here he would quote his favorite Samuel Johnson that there is no such thing as an infallible being for he will prove to be fallible some time. Don't be afraid, Miss Spafford, William is only a poor human being and makes as many mistakes as other human beings. But it is rather nice, don't you think, to have one person, even a small person, believe that you have all the knowledge in the universe?"

Helen looked from small Williamina at the

head of the table to large William at the foot, and as she met William's eyes she flushed. He interested her and piqued her curiosity. She could not understand him, and she yearned to be alone with Mrs. Macartney or Marietta, that she might ask who William was, where he came from, and why he was living in this out-of-the-way cottage with a child he had picked out of the bulrushes. She concealed this yearning as best she could and smiled at William.

"I don't know." She said it regretfully, as if she should like very much to have some one look upon her as an up-to-date encyclopedia bound in half calf.

"I know!" You might have guessed that Williamina would know. "The dogs and kittens and even the hens think I'm wonderful. That's because I feed them, and I'm good to them. Wouldn't that be the reason, William?"

"The very best of reasons," smiled William.

"And you are going to live in Mr. Knox's old house and raise vegetables?" Mrs. Macartney asked Helen, changing the subject so quickly that Williamina winked.

"That's what I thought I should do until I saw that awful garden. I do wish I knew something about raising lettuce and radishes!" And

Helen sighed because she knew so little of gardening.

"Mrs. Macartney is a splendid example of how ignorance may become wisdom," William told her comfortingly. "She only recognized a chicken when she saw it on a platter with a sprig of parsley around its neck until eight years ago. And now she can give you real expert information about the fowl in every stage from egg to frying pan."

Immediately Helen wanted to ask Mrs. Macartney a dozen questions, but Mrs. Macartney changed the subject again. Mrs. Macartney would rather talk of anything but chickens.

"Won't you be afraid to live there alone? I shouldn't be comfortable for a minute." She shivered at the mere thought of living alone in old Mr. Knox's house.

"She's going to have the yellow dog I found last week live with her," explained Williamina.

"I'd rather live alone than with the yellow dog." Mrs. Macartney was hard to please. "He is always under foot and takes up as much room as a calf," she added when Williamina gave a horrified exclamation.

"What is there to be afraid of?" asked Marietta. She had been devoting herself to the biscuits and honey and the black bass and had neglected the conversation. "Why should a woman

be afraid to be alone in a house any more than a man? This isn't 1830. I wish old Mr. Knox had left his cottage to me. I shouldn't be afraid to live in it alone. I'd prefer to live alone."

Williamina regarded her with admiration. "You'd be a splendid one to live in it with Miss Spafford. You're so fearless, and then you could take the black cat I gave you last summer and that you could never make a home for at your college."

"The black cat wouldn't like to live with Miss Spafford's yellow dog," Marietta laughed as she took another biscuit.

"They're the greatest friends!" Williamina was indignant. "I don't encourage anything but friendliness in my animals—nor in anybody."

"Don't you live here?" Helen was rather attracted by the fearless Marietta and wondered where she did live.

"I wish I did—that is for two or three months." Marietta made a quick correction. "I don't believe I could stand it any longer, although I am a candle that's been burned at both ends."

"Oh!" Williamina stared at one of Marietta White's ends and wanted to slip under the table and look at the other end. There was not the sign of a flame at Marietta's head and she was

sure there wouldn't be at Marietta's feet. What could Marietta mean?

"I did double work at college," Marietta explained languidly. "That is, I kept up my work and took a leading part in every college activity. And now I have to pay. As Williamina so truthfully remarks, you can't have without you pay, and I'm paying for my past joys. Oh, well, who cares! It will only give me more time to decide what to do next fall. I can't make up my mind whether to take up suffrage, go into a settlement house, study stenography or open a millinery shop. I can trim hats. You would think my chapeaux came straight from Paris, wouldn't you, Cousin Sophie? But I'm such a poor worm I can't decide whether to save souls, raise votes or adorn heads. If I had a place like the Knox cottage, quiet and neat, I shouldn't bother to raise vegetables. I'd curl up and hibernate until the first of September called me to action."

"Why don't you ask Miss Spafford to let you hi-hibernate in her house if you like it so much?" asked Williamina. "I'm sure she'd let you. There's lots of room, more than she needs, isn't there, Miss Spafford?"

And much to her surprise Helen said there was, and that she would like to have Marietta White hibernate in one of the extra rooms. And Mari-

etta White, after a long look that seemed to read Helen from head to heels, said she might consider it if it would be less exciting than a chicken farm where the chickens were always clucking noisily, especially in the early morning, and if her room faced west. She would not hibernate in any place where the morning sun might try to call her from her bed. And if the bed felt soft to her bones; her bones were so very, very tired that she had to find a soft place on which they could rest. And, oh, yes, if Helen Spafford would not object to her books. Cousin Sophie did not like to have Ellen Key nor Bergson nor Bernard Shaw in her house.

"I do not," Cousin Sophie admitted it honestly. "Shaw is bad enough but Ellen Key—" she shuddered at the very name of Ellen Key.

"Who is Ellen Key?" asked William showing himself hopelessly archaic by the question.

"Ellen Key," began Marietta, but Mrs. Macartney interrupted her with an imploring "Now, Marietta!" so Marietta shrugged her thin shoulders. "I must respect Cousin Sophie's wishes and take the word 'free' out of the dic. I'll tell you some time when we are alone, William," she promised.

"Tell me, too," begged Williamina, eager to hear all that William should hear.

"Sure," agreed Marietta. "Miss Spafford and

I will take you in hand and make a dandy feminist out of you."

Williamina looked doubtful. "Do I want to be a dandy feminist, William?"

"If you don't now you will some day," William answered dryly. "I understand all women creatures do."

"All but Cousin Sophie," giggled Marietta.

"You may have your choice of rooms," offered Helen bringing the conversation back to the main road. She grew more anxious every minute to have Marietta White hibernate in her house. "And if the bed isn't soft enough for your bones we'll buy a new one."

Nothing could have been fairer than that, and after the strawberries, which followed the hot biscuits, had been eaten, they all went up to the old Knox cottage to let Marietta choose her room and test the softness of the beds. Williamina watched her eagerly, and she drew a long, long breath when Marietta announced that she would accept the bed in the west room.

"My, oh my! but it will be splendid to sleep in a quiet place again," she winked at her Cousin Sophie. "I'll share your home and bills, Miss Spafford, if you don't make me get up before five A. M., and if you won't have liver and bacon for dinner oftener than once a week. I've eaten

enough liver and bacon to last me forever. I'd rather have boiled beef and cabbage."

As William and Williamina walked home they met old Mr. George Brewer, looking like a ghost in the twilight. Mr. Brewer lived a good mile below the Knox cottage in a pretentious stone house which had been built when the state was a territory. Everyone but Mr. Brewer thought it was far too large for an old bachelor, but Mr. Brewer insisted that there was no reason nor no law why a man shouldn't have as much room as he pleased and could pay for. Space did not belong exclusively to women—yet. He was a man of strong likes and dislikes. He hated women, oysters, "Home, Sweet Home," and all sentimental drivel, woolen clothes and modern writers. There was no one he admired as he did old Samuel Johnson, whom he quoted in and out of season. He wore white linen and duck all the time, and when it was too cold to wear them in comfort in the north he went south where it wasn't. He was sauntering down the road, like a white shadow, his pipe in his mouth, when he saw William and Williamina.

"Hello," he called. "Who is that upstanding young female at old Knox's place, William?"

It was Williamina, not William, who explained, and she did it in full, with notes and an appendix.

Mr. Brewer laughed. "Better look out, William. I don't trust a female within tongue's range. She'll be marrying you inside of a month, see if she doesn't."

"Oh, no, she won't," Williamina told him eagerly. "William doesn't know a single thing about growing lettuces. Louis makes our garden."

"Neither does she, I'll warrant. It'll be a bond between them," chuckled Mr. Brewer, and there was something almost malicious in his enjoyment of the thought that William would be married in a month. "You'll see," he told William. "I'll give you a month."

"If you could see Miss Spafford you wouldn't give me a week." William was as placid as ever. He did not seem to be at all afraid that he would be married within four weeks. "She's a most attractive girl—a modern girl, Mr. Brewer. I hope she makes a success of her garden."

"She won't have to worry about that if she makes a success of nabbing you. What does she want that cousin of Mrs. Macartney's hanging around for? That girl's all tongue, sharp as a razor. She had the nerve to tell me that old Sam Johnson wasn't looked upon with much respect at that fool college of hers. They say he's stilted. STILTED! The Lord doesn't make

girls as he used to, all sugar and velvet. Vinegar and needles is what they are now. I wouldn't have anything to do with one of 'em, not one. But, William, I didn't stop to give you my opinion of fool females—I reckon you know it, and it would be a waste of time—but to tell you I've had bad news."

"Bad news!" Both William and Williamina were ready with their sympathy at once.

"What is it?" asked William. "Anything I can do?"

"There's nothing anyone can do," grumbled Mr. Brewer. "I guess old Samuel was right when he said 'human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed.' That's true, if it is stilted, as that chit of a Marietta would tell me it is. I just had a letter from my nephew, William. He's coming down here to spend his vacation." And Mr. Brewer groaned.

"I should think you'd call that good news," rebuked Williamina, although she had never seen Mr. Brewer's nephew. She had never heard of him before.

"That shows how little you know my nephew. I hate the modern young man only one degree less than the modern young woman. Fools, both of 'em, deliberately throwing away the best there is

in life to be smart and impertinent. No reverence for anybody. This boy of mine, William, the last time I saw him, dared to call Dr. Johnson, Dr. Samuel Johnson, a nut." He paused to give William an opportunity to express his horrified disgust.

"A nut?" It was Williamina who asked the question, for William had burst into a hearty laugh. "What did he mean? I know what a nut is, an eating nut, but what would a man nut be?" She was frankly puzzled.

"God knows!" Mr. Brewer said heatedly. "Samuel Johnson, the greatest mind the world has every produced—a nut! And the man who dared to say that is going to inflict himself upon me for a month. A month, William. Thirty days. I warn you it will be for no good. I'm a patient man," he really thought he was, "but I'd far better tell him I'm going away. I can go north on that fishing trip I've been talking of and leave the place to him. I'd rather do it than have to listen to such impudence. His mother was a silly thing but he—" Mr. Brewer drew a sigh that was deeper than any well.

"When is he coming?" William displayed a lamentable lack of sympathy, for he grinned instead of sighing with Mr. Brewer.

"Almost any time. I hope you remember to

thank Providence occasionally that you weren't given any nephews, William. I can't see for the life of me what good they are to a man. God knows I don't want war—no man who has been through one war wants another—but there are thousands of young fellows like my fool nephew in this country just spoiling for the discipline the army would give them. I hope the boy won't come. I can't have him under foot all the time. And what can I do with him? I ask you, William Kirwin, what can I do with him?" He asked it piteously.

Again it was Williamina, not William, who answered him, and there was no hesitation in her voice. She knew at once what Mr. Brewer could do with his nephew.

"You can let him grow lettuces for Miss Spafford," she said firmly.

CHAPTER IV

THE next afternoon Mrs. Macartney left the chickens to look after themselves and, carrying a plate covered with a white napkin, sauntered down to the Knox cottage. She found that Helen and Marietta had dragged the two old walnut sofas from Mr. Knox's living room to the porch and placed them face to face. On each couch reclined a girl in a blue checked gingham apron, borrowed from Mrs. Macartney, and before she rounded the corner of the house Mrs. Macartney heard them arguing the all-absorbing question of feminism. Marietta saw her first and sat up to wave a welcoming hand.

"Don't dare to tell me that is anything but one of your best chocolate cakes," she called. "Don't dare tell me such a thing, Cousin Sophie."

Cousin Sophie laughed. "I shouldn't dare. No matter what I started with, it would have to be a chocolate cake now. You girls should be ashamed of yourselves, loafing on those sofas talking nonsense, when there must be plenty of work for you inside." She looked at Helen rather

curiously. Helen seemed older than she had the night before. "Oh, it's your hair," she said, relieved to have solved the puzzle so soon.

Helen looked guilty and put her hand to her hair, which was not worn as it had been the night before. "What?" she murmured, although she knew very well what Mrs. Macartney meant.

"It makes you look so much older," Mrs. Macartney explained, feeling that perhaps she had not solved her puzzle. Why should any girl wish to look older than she had to look?

"That's what I told her." Marietta had whipped the napkin from Mrs. Macartney's cake and was gloating over it. You might have thought Marietta had never seen a chocolate cake before.

"Does it?" Evidently Helen did not mind if she did look older than she had to, for she smiled. She did not explain that she had stared into old Mr. Knox's mirror before she went to bed and called the reflection she saw there a "baby face." She had done her hair many times before she found a style which added years and dignity to the baby face, and she wore it that way now with great satisfaction.

"We haven't set any time limit as to when this house shall be in apple-pie order, and, anyway, an eight-hour day is long enough for us. We belong to the union." Marietta stopped gloating

to answer the original question. "Look at that, Helen Spafford!" She held the cake up for her inspection.

"Delicious!" Helen was glad to have the conversation shift from hair to cake. "The frosting looks inches thick. It's mighty good of you to bring it to us, Mrs. Macartney. I never saw a cake I liked the looks of half so well."

"A slice of cake suggests a cup of tea to me," Marietta murmured pensively. "If I were the mistress of this first-class boarding establishment I should serve tea at—" she glanced at her wrist watch—"at three-thirty o'clock this afternoon."

"This is not a boarding-house." Helen spoke with chill dignity. "This is a coöperative establishment. You know where the kettle is as well as I do."

Evidently Marietta did, for after she had crinkled up her nose at Helen, she went inside to return in a very short time with the tea.

"I thought Williamina was here?" asked Mrs. Macartney, as she waited for her cup.

"She was, but she heard William's voice in the offing and ran away, leaving old Mr. Knox's nicked china half washed," explained Marietta. "I suppose Helen or I will have to finish it."

"I'll do it," Helen offered at once. "I like Williamina. I'm curious about her." Here was

the chance she had been waiting for ever since Williamina and William had found her on the steps. She and Marietta had had so much to talk of. They had discovered two mutual friends and at least one burning question on which they disagreed. Marietta had never mentioned either William or Williamina, and an odd shyness had kept Helen from mentioning them.

"About William, you mean," Marietta murmured now, her mouth disgracefully full of chocolate cake.

In a flash Helen ceased to be a black and white girl, for a scarlet wave dyed her cheeks and even ran up into her hair. She was furious at the self-consciousness that had changed her color, and she turned her head to hide it from Marietta and Mrs. Macartney. She need not have bothered. Marietta's entire attention was devoted to the cake, and Mrs. Macartney was looking at a jagged tear in the original black hair cloth which still covered the old sofa. Neither of them had an eye for Helen.

"About Mr. Kirwin, too," Helen said at last, devoutly hoping that her voice expressed only neighborly interest.

"I should think you would be," went on Marietta. "I should think anyone would be. The idea of a man like William Kirwin living in this

jumping-off place when the world needs decent men as it never needed them before! An acquaintance of some eight years, which began when I was all hair ribbons and legs, enables me to pronounce the aforesaid William a very decent man."

"Then what's he doing in this jumping-off place?" demanded Helen. The words fairly tumbled from her lips, she was so eager to have them answered.

Marietta waved a languid hand to her cousin before she refilled her cup. "Cousin Sophie, the story is yours." Marietta liked to talk, as you will learn, but she liked fresh chocolate cake better, and she cut herself another piece.

"Where do you want me to begin?" Mrs. Macartney was only too glad to tell William's story.

"At the beginning," begged Helen, pushing aside her cup and saucer. "How long have you known William—and Williamina?" she added hurriedly.

"I've known William ever since we moved up here about eleven years ago. Dave, my husband, cut himself building one of the chicken runs, and I thought he would bleed to death. I screamed like a Comanche Indian. It was all I knew how to do then, but you may believe I've learned to

do more since. The owner of a chicken farm has to have a very comprehensive knowledge of everything. William heard me and came in. He made a tourniquet and then went for a doctor. From that day to this William Kirwin has been my guide and counselor. He is a good man, Marietta is right, and he should be out in the world. But I should hate to think what this stretch of the river would be without him. He graduated from Boston Tech.," she went on, just warming up to her story. "His father and mother died before he finished his post-graduate work in chemistry, and when he came back there was no one to make a home for him. Then came the Spanish-American War, and William was the first man in this part of the country to volunteer. He was wild to go. His father had fought in the Civil War; his grandfather was in Mexico with Scott; a great-grandfather in New Orleans with Jackson and another great at Valley Forge with Washington. You see it meant a lot to William, the chance of fighting for his country. But he couldn't pass the physical examination. The doctor found serious trouble in his lungs and told him if he wanted to live at all he would have to go away from towns and cities into the pines. He wouldn't promise him a year if he didn't. William was tempted to take the year, but the

thought that he would be a danger to others sent him up the river to the little grove of pines where he lives now. He felt like a leper, he told me. The whole thing was a cruel disappointment and made him very bitter. He never said a word to his friends, but just disappeared and buried himself here. He had some money, enough to live on comfortably. He didn't begin to spend his income for years, but now—he buys Williamina's clothes at the best shops in Waloo.

"He lived alone, growing more bitter, more morose and more disagreeable every day. You can imagine how hard it was. He had such high ideals in regard to service to his country and to the world; he was more ambitious than most young men, and it poisoned him to give everything up and live out of the world. He didn't let anyone know where he was and just dropped out of the lives of his friends. That wasn't as hard as it sounds, for people are selfish and those who disappear are forgotten. William's closest friends went to the Philippines with the volunteers and when they came back William had been lost for months. When we moved up here he was a regular hermit, the worst kind. He didn't go to town even for his supplies. He would not read a paper or a magazine, but took a curious pride in being ignorant of what was happening.

He was as queer and unreasonable and disagreeable as a man could be. Even after he helped me with Dave he would have nothing to do with us until Williamina came."

"She told me he found her in the bulrushes, like Moses," interrupted Helen.

"And so he did. I remember it so well. There had been a dreadful storm, a high wind which threatened to blow everything into the river, and then rain, a deluge. The next morning William went up the bank to see what damage had been done to his trees, and in a little inlet, not half a mile from here, where the cattails and rushes grow thick, he found a rowboat with Williamina asleep in it. William brought her right to me. So far as I could judge she was about a year and a half old and was none the worse for what she had gone through. Dave was in bed with inflammatory rheumatism and required more attention than I could give him and little Dave. I hadn't any time to look after Williamina, and a child a year and a half old has to be looked after. William just had to take care of her. He was the funniest thing as he warmed milk and fed her and walked the floor with her when she cried, complaining all the time and vowing that all waifs and strays should be exposed in the old Spartan way. How he fussed when he had to wash and

dress that baby! The roads to town were all washed out and for two days William had to be a nurse girl. By the time the roads were passable and he could take Williamina to town he had stopped talking about orphan asylums. He was furious when I reminded him that he had ever said he was going to put her in one. He tried to find where she came from, but there wasn't a clue of any sort about her, nor in the boat. William inquired and advertised in all the river towns, but no one answered, and at last he stopped. 'She was sent to me, and I'll keep her,' he said. And it was the best thing for him. She adores him and he adores her. He can't bear to have her out of his sight. And she's changed him, until now he doesn't run away from people. Williamina wouldn't let him," she laughed. "Williamina's the friendliest soul in the world, and she has made William friendly. After Dave died, I don't know what I should have done if it hadn't been for William. I didn't know a brooder from a feed basin, but he made me learn. He has sat up with me many a night feeding the hateful chickens red pepper and talking philosophy and children's clothes. Six years ago Williamina found a broken-down old tramp on the river bank, Red Ginny, and William has made him over into Jacob Schwartz, who knows more about chickens

than the hens. He's been with me ever since. I couldn't raise chickens without him."

"You know Williamina has been brought up on fairy tales." Marietta had finished her cake and could take a part in the conversation again. "She thinks every animal and person she meets is bewitched if they aren't beautiful and friendly. She is always bringing some poor wreck home to be made over. William has taught her himself, the queerest jumble. She knows the old gods and goddesses as most kids know their first cousins. She told me once that she was a fairy put in the old boat for William to find because he was all alone, and she really believes it. She certainly has him under a spell. But she has made him into a human being again."

"She surely has." Mrs. Macartney smiled as she recalled the time when William had been anything but a human being. "Everyone along the river, on both sides for ten miles, brings his troubles and joys to William and he helps them. He built the addition to his shack the year after Williamina came, and sent for his old family furniture and began to live like a Christian again. And then Williamina found Louis, who takes care of both of them like a doting mother."

"She told me about that." Helen was leaning forward, all eager ears.

"Dear, dear! How strange it seems." Mrs. Macartney sighed softly.

"All the same," broke in Marietta, as she turned the teapot upside down, so that the last drop of tea should not be wasted, "if you want my opinion of this William, this neighborhood adviser, this pine-grove philosopher, I'll give it to you. I consider him a coward. A coward! Yes, madam, I said it. William Kirwin is a coward."

"Marietta White!" The duet was an indignant one, for they were both shocked. Cousin Sophie, being the oldest, was shocked the most. She showed it all over her usually placid face.

"Why, Marietta," she gasped. "How can you say that?"

"Easy," Marietta told her, with her nose in the air. "You make me tired. Do you think a man should sleep all day as well as all night? In Africa that's called the sleeping sickness, and it's regarded as a menace. I think too much of William Kirwin to let him sleep himself to death. It's my belief, Cousin Sophie, that everyone, man, woman and child, should do a share in the world's work. What has William Kirwin done in comparison with what he could do? Answer me that!"

Cousin Sophie couldn't answer her, although

her mouth was wide open. She could only sit and stare as Marietta went on:

"Any man with a normal brain, a pair of perfectly good hands and feet and the knowledge of chemistry that William Kirwin has is a slacker when he loafs in this out-of-the-way corner. Just think, Helen, some years ago, when Williamina cried for colored Easter eggs, William took up some of his old experiments. He colored Williamina's eggs and then went on working until he had the most marvelous color card. 'William's rainbow,' the kid called it. But you know what dyes mean now when we can't get them from Germany, and William won't do a thing with his. He just laughs and says they belong to Bill. It makes me furious. Just think what is going on out there today." She flung out her hand with a passionate gesture. "Why, the world's being made over! Any normal man or woman should want to lend a hand, but here William sits like a stupid ninny. He's a very good man, a very clever man, and he could play a big part if he would. But he won't, and so he's a lazy coward. Why, he should be a married man and the father of at least five kids. And here he is a selfish old bachelor!" Marietta must have had a small opinion of bachelors, for there was so much scorn in her voice when she spoke of them.

"Why doesn't he go back?" asked Helen. "He's all right now? He isn't ill?" For William looked like anything but an invalid.

"Oh, no. He's all right now, perfectly sound. But he's used to it here. He has been out of touch with the world too long to go back. It is a pity." And Mrs. Macartney sighed again.

"What keeps him here is that imp Williamina!" Marietta spoke as one who knew. "She doesn't give him time for regrets. She keeps him too well amused. I have just about made up my mind," she said slowly, but there was a malicious determination in her voice that made them look at her, "to give up votes and souls and millinery and organize a William Kirwin Rescue League to put William back in the world. Will you join?" She looked at them and her eyes sparkled impishly.

"How would you do it?" Helen hadn't the faintest idea how such a thing could be done.

But Marietta had. Marietta always had ideas.

"We'll remove Williamina. That will create a vacuum in William's life. He won't be satisfied now to sit down and bewail fate. Williamina has done that much for him. A judicious word from you—" she looked at Mrs. Macartney—"and from you—" she nodded at Helen—"and a good, big prod from me"—to hear her you would

know that Marietta would not be stingy with her prod—"and we'll have William where he belongs."

"But how will you remove Williamina?" Mrs. Macartney could see flaws in Marietta's plan. "William will never give her up."

"William can't refuse." Marietta was as cool as cool. "He has no legal claim on Williamina. I reckon the child's own people come first, anyway."

"Own people!" gasped Mrs. Macartney, for Marietta spoke as if she had Williamina's own people in the pocket of her skirt. "What do you mean, Marietta White?"

"However will you find Williamina's own people?" asked Helen, who must have liked the idea enormously, for her eyes shone.

Marietta put down her empty cup and looked from one to the other. There was an impudent tilt to her red head and an impudent light in her brown eyes.

"By looking for them," she said calmly.

"How dare you?" Helen's voice was full of awe and envy and admiration. She wished she dared to do what Marietta dared.

"Pooh!" There was only contempt in Marietta's soft voice. "I dare anything—once."

CHAPTER V

LITTLE thinking that a plot was being hatched against them, William and Williamina strolled across the fields to the store on the trolley line, a mile away. They chatted pleasantly of how much truth there was in the old saying, "If you laugh before breakfast, you will cry before night." Williamina was able to bring forth definite instances which proved points for both sides, but before they had exhausted the subject a squirrel scurrying across the path reminded Williamina of *Alice's* white rabbit in Wonderland. She asked eagerly if William knew whether the rabbit talked rabbit or English. If he talked rabbit, could *Alice* understand him when she had never learned a word of rabbit talk? William suggested that the strangest things were possible in dreams, and Williamina remembered that some people have a natural gift for animal languages; they don't seem to have to learn them. There was old Danny Simms, who could understand the birds. He often translated what they were chirping to her when they heard them in the bushes.

"And he never studied a word of bird talk. He told me so. I can understand dogs and kittens and even the hens pretty well," she said proudly. "But of course it's only when they ask for quite simple things, water and food, and to be let out. But when I listen to the birds, I just have to imagine what they are saying."

"That's as good a way as any." William was the most comforting person to talk to. "You know, really, Bill, even with people it's what you think they say that counts more than what they actually do say."

Williamina hadn't a word to say to that, for they had come to Smith and Wobbler's general store and Williamina had stopped spellbound and even William said: "Hello!"

And no wonder, for the billboard which ran along the road across from the store, and which was always as fascinating as any colored picture book, was today covered with the most enchanting, the most delightful pictures Williamina had ever seen.

"What is it, William? What is it?" she cried, running across the road that she might see for herself.

He followed her more leisurely. "Is it possible, Bill, that you have never seen a circus post-

"Is it possible, Bill, that you have never seen a circus poster?"

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er?" He seemed quite shocked to find that she hadn't.

"A circus!" Were those wonderful pictures of a circus? Williamina knew vaguely what a circus was, William had shown her pictures of one in an old Roman history, but the broken down ruin was not a bit like this billboard. Not the least little bit in the world! She was speechless as she stood before the gaudy lithographs which flaunted such a gay procession of rare animals "from every clime," the poster said, the spangled-tighted acrobats, the to-be-envied and beautiful ladies so luxuriously riding the gorgeously caparisoned elephants and camels, the uniformed seals which were doing many things Williamina had never learned to do, the funny clowns with their white faces, the chariots, more beautiful than in Williamina's picture books. Just to stand and gaze at the alluring pictures sent little waves of awed wonder down Williamina's minute spine.

"Oh! Oh!" she murmured as she looked and looked and looked.

Fat Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler, as Williamina had always called either partner, came to the door of the store, and when he saw the speechless Williamina and the amused William, he waddled over to stand beside them.

"Well," he remarked pleasantly, for as he was

a plump general storekeeper, he was usually pleasant. "Here's a chance for folks to spend their money."

"Hello, Wobbler," smiled William. "This is something new."

"Right you are, Mr. Kirwin," rumbled Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler. "It's some time since there's been a circus in Mifflin. I expect this young lady'd be willing to sell her shoes to go." And he winked at William while he turned a sober face to Williamina.

Williamina looked down at her shoes, which were grimy with the dust of the field. They were not her best shoes. She had another pair, beautiful and shining, at home. They were her greatest pride, but she would be quite willing to exchange the dusty shoes for a ticket, and she said so breathlessly, as if she feared the opportunity would disappear if she did not snatch at it at once.

Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler and William laughed.

"You'll have time to earn some money before the twenty-fifth of July," promised Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler. "Don't your hens do any work at all? I'm paying twenty-six cents a dozen for fresh eggs this minute."

"Our hens never have worked for money." Williamina spoke doubtfully as if she were not at all sure that her hens ever would work for

money. "It's Mrs. Macartney's hens that are the little gold mines. I've heard her say so more than once."

"Well, you put it up to your hens." Mr. Smithan'-Wobbler winked a fat eyelid at William again. "They'll do their best for you if they understand. Well, Mr. Kirwin, comin' over?"

Williamina refused to go over. There was nothing in the store that would be half as interesting as the billboard. She gloated over it until William came back.

"Oh, William, we must go!" she cried. "Do you suppose the hens will ever help us? I couldn't go without you, you know."

"And I shouldn't take a step without you," chuckled William. "I couldn't! A grown man would die of shame if he was discovered at a circus without a child with him. You'll have to put it up to the hens, Bill, as Mr. Wobbler suggested, and beg them to do their best."

"I will!" promised Williamina fervently. "And I'll pray, too. It won't do any harm, and God wouldn't let there be circuses unless he wanted people to go to them, would he? You know he was always spoiling things he didn't like the children of Israel to have."

"That's true." William spoke seriously, as if he had never realized how true it was until Wil-

liamina explained it. "You pray for what you want, Bill. You have a right to ask for anything."

"And I'll get it, won't I? You always say I can have what I want if I pay for it. Oh, dear, now we're back at the hens again."

"And here's Dave." William waved a hand to Dave, who jumped out of a clump of bushes where a road branched off the main thoroughfare to go to Mr. Brewer's big house. "I say, Dave," he said, "you look after Bill while I stop at Mr. Brewer's. He bought an old copy of Samuel Johnson up at Waloo the other day, and he doesn't know whether it is a priceless first edition or a worthless reprint. He asked me to run down and look it over."

"All right," murmured Dave carelessly, although secretly he thought Williamina could look after herself. She knew the way home as well as he did.

"Would you know a priceless first edition, William?" Williamina hadn't an idea what such a thing could be, and she spoke a little jealously as if she would rather William would not know, either.

"I should not," he told her with a smile, and he waved his hand as his legs disappeared behind the clump of bushes. "Not from the most worth-

less reprint." And then his head disappeared.

"What is a priceless first edition?" asked Dave, as he kicked a stone in front of him, up the road.

"Oh, it is—it's—" Williamina hated to admit that she didn't know, and she shifted the conversation to something she had just learned and told him about the billboard and the treat that was coming to Mifflin.

"A circus here? I don't believe it!" Dave was scornful because he hadn't seen the billboard for himself.

"It's true," Williamina insisted, her cheeks aflame. "The billboard said so and so did Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler. Isn't it wonderful, Dave Macartney? Isn't it just too wonderful?" Her feet danced as she thought how wonderful it was.

"Oh, a circus isn't so much. I saw one when I was in Waloo to have my tonsils out. It wasn't so much." Dave's indifference was maddening.

"Oh, Dave!" Williamina refused to believe him. "It is! It has rare animals 'from every clime.' Anyway I'm going and so is William."

"I'll go to," offered Dave. "I'd just as soon see another."

That left no further field for argument, and for almost ten seconds they were silent while Dave kicked the stone in front of him, and Williamina remembered the glories of the billboard.

"Oh!" she cried suddenly. "Why—why—Dave! Look there!" Her finger pointed up the curve in the road which they had rounded. "There's been an accident!" For an automobile lay on its side overhanging the low embankment.

"Gosh!" Dave broke into a run. "Wonder if anyone's killed."

Williamina's heart was in her mouth as she flew after him. She hoped no one had been killed, that no one had been hurt when the roadster turned over.

"Look at that steering wheel!" Dave had stopped to stare at the machine.

Williamina looked beyond it and saw a man crumpled about a big pine tree several feet away.

"Oh!" she murmured pitifully. "Look, Dave!"

"Gosh!" murmured Dave again.

"I say," the voice was very faint as it came from the pine tree. "Help me unwind myself. I don't seem to be able to manage alone."

With Dave's assistance the voice was unwrapped from the pine tree and proved to belong to a tall young man with a scratched and dirty face under a tangle of black hair. His silk shirt was torn and dirty, too. He drew a long breath which caught several times before it was half long enough, and began to count his injuries, propping

himself against the tree. Williamina and Dave stared at him.

"Arms and shoulders— Gee!" he winced as his hands ran over them. "Right leg—ah!" he winced again as he tried his right leg. "There's trouble there. And I'm all one bruise. Six feet and one inch of black and blue spots. And my ribs! Maybe they're not all smashed!" He knew they were smashed and groaned. "What the deuce am I to do? I say, kids, is there any place around here where I can get some one to help me?" His face was white as paper, and he threw an arm about the pine tree to keep himself from falling.

"You're right at the gate of old Mr. Knox's house." Williamina pointed a shaking finger at the board fence which hid old Mr. Knox's house. "He's in Heaven, but Miss Spafford's living there now. I'm sure she would want to help you. Dave and I can help, too."

"I wonder!" The white face twisted with pain as he looked at them. He wavered and caught at Dave's shoulder.

"Sure we can," offered Dave, proudly important. "It isn't far."

"I can't stay here." He winced again and swallowed another groan. "So lead on, MacDuff."

"We're not MacDuffs," Williamina told him as she and Dave helped him through the gate and down the path that led around the house. "I'm Williamina and Dave is Dave Macartney. There's Miss Spafford now—at the window!" She called excitedly, "Miss Spafford! Miss Spafford! I'm bringing you a man!"

Marietta White had walked back to Wayside Farm with Mrs. Macartney, and Helen had been left alone. She ran out on the porch.

"What is it, Williamina?" she called, almost startled out of her wits by the strange sight of a six-foot one-inch man, with a face as white as his silk shirt and streaked with dirt and blood, leaning weakly on a small boy and an equally small girl.

Dave and Williamina tried to tell her at the same time, and although the result was not satisfactory, Helen managed to understand that there had been an accident, and the victim was before her.

"Help him up on the porch," she said. "The sofa is there, and he can lie right down."

"Good word—lie," murmured the victim shakily. His forehead was crossed with deep, deep wrinkles and his mouth was pressed into a thin colorless line. "Let me rest here a minute," he gasped when they reached the steps. "My name's

Brown," he said to Helen, adding with a great effort—"Bob Brown." And then he fainted.

Helen screamed. She could not help it. She had never seen a man faint before, and she hoped she never would again as she stared down at the white face and the crisp black head of Bob Brown. By all the rules of romance she should have been eager to help him, but she wasn't. She was indignant and disgusted. If Mr. Bob Brown wanted to faint on a porch, why couldn't he have chosen some other porch? She didn't know what to do for him. It was Williamina who ran for water, and who told Helen to rub Bob Brown's hands.

"That's what William did when Mrs. Smithson, the postman's wife, fainted for him," she exclaimed breathlessly and as if Mrs. Smithson fainted for exhibition purposes.

Helen took the glass from her and sprinkled Bob Brown vigorously and fervently, while Williamina slapped his hands. Under this treatment he recovered consciousness with pleasing promptness.

"I say," he murmured in a whispy voice, and he shivered as another deluge fell on his head. "What a nuisance I am! I'll be all right in a minute. It was that—that steering wheel!"

"Do you think you could get on the sofa if I

moved it over here?" Helen was almost as white as he was. "You help us, Dave."

And with Dave's assistance she managed to get Bob Brown from the porch floor to the couch, where he fainted again. Helen was furious. This was worse than school teaching, far, far worse. She turned fiercely to Williamina.

"Oh, Williamina!" Her voice told Williamina that Helen yearned to shake her. "Why did you bring him here? A perfect stranger! What shall I do?" She looked at Williamina helplessly. She didn't know what to do.

"I brought him right to you." Williamina's lip trembled as she looked at the pale face against the black haircloth which covered old Mr. Knox's sofa. "And he isn't a perfect stranger now. He told us his name."

"You might have brought a nurse, too." Helen went on most unreasonably, for nurses do not grow on hazel bushes. "I'm sure I don't know what to do for him. If we even had a telephone."

"There's a telephone at our house." Dave was ready to dash to it, but Helen caught his sleeve.

"You stay right here with me, Dave Macartney! I'm not going to be left alone with this strange man. Williamina can go and telephone for the doctor. Tell Mrs. Macartney and Mari-

etta to come back as fast as they can!" she begged of Williamina, still clinging to Dave's sleeve.

"Sure I can go!" Williamina was eager to do what she could. "I'll be back before you can say Jack Robinson," she promised over her shoulder.

CHAPTER VI

AS Williamina dashed out the gate a small runabout rolled slowly up the road. Williamina would have given it scant attention if the chauffeur had not hailed her.

"Little girl! Little girl!" called a deep, deep voice. "Is this the Wayside Farm?"

Williamina tossed her head to get the sunbeams out of her eyes and stopped to look at the small car. A large round woman with a large round face filled the seat. She made Williamina think of the ogre's wife, who was so kind to *Jack* when he climbed the beanstalk.

"No'm," she answered as soon as she could gather breath for speech. "It's old Mr. Knox's place. But he doesn't live there any more. He's moved to Heaven."

The fat woman made a noise like a trumpet. "A good move, I should say, from what I can see over the fence. Well, if this isn't the Wayside Farm, where is it?"

"Down the road about a mile. If you follow me you can't miss it. I'm going there as fast as I

can." And she would have shown how fast she could go if the fat woman had not called to her.

"You'll go faster and show me better if you climb in here." She patted the six inches that were to spare on the seat beside her. "Two legs are all very well, but four wheels go faster even though I'm not one for speed. Now, then," when Williamina had squeezed herself into the six inches, "What's all this?" she waved a fat hand toward the wrecked car. "Don't tell me there's been an accident, for I have two good eyes and can see that as well as anyone. But has anybody been hurt?"

Williamina's breath was still coming in such large gasps that speech was difficult, but she was able to explain at last how she and Dave had found a man wrapped around the big pine tree. His name was Mr. Bob Brown, and at that very minute he was fainting on old Mr. Knox's sofa, which Miss Spafford didn't like. That was why she was running to Wayside Farm as fast as she could. She was to telephone for a doctor.

"God bless my soul!" murmured the fat woman, and she smiled quite as if she were glad that Mr. Bob Brown had been wrapped around the big pine. "If it wasn't a streak of luck that made you run into me! I'm not a doctor, but I'm the next thing to a doctor. Just as soon as you do

your telephoning we'll go right back and I'll see what I can do."

Williamina stared at her. "Are—are you a m—magician?" she stuttered. It would be so wonderful if the fat woman was.

The fat woman looked at her with a benevolent smile. It was the very broadest smile Williamina had ever seen. "I'm a nurse, child," she said with great dignity. "A trained and registered nurse."

"Oh!" Williamina stared harder. It was magic. She could scarcely believe that it was true. It was too wonderful that as soon as Miss Spafford should ask her for a nurse she should go out and find a nurse. It must be magic.

The fat woman was talking on in her deep voice which made a pleasant rumble in Williamina's ears.

"I'm just as much of a trained and registered nurse as I ever was, although I haven't had a case for six months. I haven't really been at work since old Mrs. Hungerford died the tenth of last July and left me her house and eighty-seven and a half dollars every month for as long as I live. I nursed old Mrs. Hungerford for thirty-one months, three weeks and five days, and it wasn't any more than right that she should show she was grateful. It was a hard case. For weeks I never took my clothes off, night or day, and I'd hate to

tell you how many days went by without my taking even an hour off. And as for her diet—— If I was to talk from now until doomsday I couldn't begin to tell you about that. I slaved like a dog, and then we both got our reward. She died, and I had my legacy. I've queer ideas, little girl." She frowned at Williamina, and Williamina murmured feebly, "Yes, ma'am," although she didn't know whether the fat woman's ideas were queer or not.

"There are more nurses now in the world than there are sick people for them to take care of, and when I got my eighty-seven dollars and a half a month I felt it wouldn't be right for me to keep on nursing and taking the bread and butter out of the mouths of girls who didn't have eighty-seven dollars and a half a month and a nice little house six blocks from the Mifflin postoffice. At first it was easy to do nothing, but now the good Lord knows I'm perishing for a chance to be useful to somebody again. When I was working I never had a chance to make friends, and when I stopped work I found I'd forgotten how. When old Mrs. Hungerford died it scared me, for I knew some day I'd have to die, too—we all have to—and who's coming to my funeral?" She put the question fiercely and went on before Williamina could stammer that she would come, she would be glad to: "You can't have a real funeral without friends

to mourn, and I haven't got any friends. As I say, I've forgotten how to make them. I bought this machine secondhand, if you don't count the first man who only kept it two months, thinking the neighbors would let me take them out and we'd get real friendly, but they don't trust my driving. I'm glad I met you, for as soon as we call up the doctor I'll go back to the house of that man who's moved to Heaven and nurse that young man until he's well."

Williamina could only stare at her. There was absolutely nothing else she could do in the face of such a torrent of words.

"My name," went on the fat woman, "is Imogene—Imogene Grace Butters. The Imogene's for my father's mother and the Grace for a cousin of my mother's that my mother quarreled with four days after I was baptized. My, but she was mad she'd called me Grace, but it was too late. I think myself that Grace is a very pretty name, prettier than Mehitable or Maria, but I never took any real comfort in it after the way my mother felt." Her sigh seemed to rock the little car, and Williamina clutched the side of the seat with nervous fingers.

"Here's Wayside Farm!" she called joyfully. "And here's Mrs. Macartney and Marietta White." For the two stood just inside the gate

under the neat little sign which William had painted and which would tell Nurse Butters that Williamina was right, they were at the Wayside Farm.

Mrs. Macartney and Marietta turned at the blare of the motor horn.

"Why, Williamina!" Both Mrs. Macartney and Marietta looked at Williamina's companion instead of at Williamina. And if Nurse Butters made Williamina think of an ogre's wife, she made Mrs. Macartney think of the drop cakes she made for the children when the dough fell from the spoon to spread stiffly over the pan as Nurse Butters seemed to spread over the seat of her runabout.

Nurse Butters insisted on helping Williamina explain why she had come, until at last Williamina left all of the explanation to her and flew into the house to telephone to the doctor. Marietta White was at her heels.

"Tell me exactly what has happened, Williamina," she said, putting her hands on Williamina's shoulders.

And Williamina told her again how she and Dave had found a man wrapped around the big pine tree and had taken him to old Mr. Knox's house, where he had fainted twice, once on the steps and again on old Mr. Knox's sofa.

"Oh, dear!" mourned Marietta. "I'll bet Helen Spafford is crazy. Why did I ever walk back with Cousin Sophie?"

Williamina did not try to tell her. She had taken the telephone receiver from the hook and was asking Central to please give her Dr. Grey just as soon as she could.

"He's the doctor I had when I had the measles," she explained importantly to Marietta. "He's awful nice. I've a patient for you, Dr. Grey!" she called through the transmitter. "It's Williamina—William Kirwin's Williamina, and I've a patient to give you. It's a man Dave Macartney and I found around a pine tree. Oh, dear!" she turned a troubled face to Marietta. "He acts as if he didn't believe me."

"Let me speak to him." Marietta took the receiver and in time was able to make the doctor understand that there had been an accident, and that he was wanted at the old Knox cottage on the upper river road as soon as he could get there. No, she did not know where the man was hurt, but would he please come at once.

The doctor said he would, as soon as he could clear his office of patients, and fortunately there were only two besides the one he was talking to at that minute. He would be out as soon as possible.

"Then that's all right." Marietta restored

the receiver to its hook and looked at Williamina. "Who is the man, Williamina? Do you know?"

"His name is Brown, Bob—that's short for Robert, isn't it?—Mr. Robert Brown. I don't know anything but that. As soon as I found him I took him right to Miss Spafford and gave him to her. I thought perhaps he might know how to grow lettuce," she explained hurriedly as Marietta frowned. "William said she'd need somebody to help her."

"A splendid lettuce grower he must be, fainting all over the place. Now, look here, Williamina, it's all very well to give people things, but first you have to have a right to give them. The only man you have any proprietary interest in is William. Just remember that when you feel generous. You can't give away any man but William," she insisted with a giggle.

"I'll never give William away!" Williamina's eyes flashed fire at the mere thought. "Never, so long as I live will I give William away! And he won't give me away so long as he lives, either! We belong together. Why, it was William the Lord sent to find me in the bulrushes," she said triumphantly.

"That's as may be," laughed Marietta. "Come on. We can't stop to argue. We must go back

and help Helen take care of that poor young man."

"Nurse Butters said she would take care of him," murmured Williamina, trotting along beside her.

Marietta stopped so short that Williamina all but fell against her. "Williamina," she said sternly, "did you give Mr. Robert Brown to the fat woman, too?"

"No, I didn't!" Williamina was almost in tears. "I didn't give him to anyone but Miss Spafford. But Nurse Butters said she was a nurse who couldn't be a regular nurse because old Mrs. Hungerford had died and left her eighty-seven dollars and fifty cents a month and a nice house six blocks from the Mifflin post office, and it would be taking bread and butter out of other mouths, and so she was glad to hear Mr. Brown had broken his steering wheel so she could have friends to go to her funeral."

By the time Williamina had reached a period they were at the gate, where bewildered Mrs. Macartney was listening to the story of Nurse Butters' life.

"I was going to buy a dozen eggs and one spring chicken," Nurse Butters was saying. "But if I'm going to nurse that young man I shan't need them. A nurse is always given her board,

such as it is. I'll stop and get them when I'm ready to go home."

"If you're going to nurse at the Knox cottage I should advise you to take them with you," suggested Marietta. "The pantry there is not as well stocked as it might be. I'm going back with you." She deftly wriggled her way in beside Nurse Butters. "I live there," she explained. "'That's how I know about the pantry. Williamina, you'll have to perch on my knee."

"It makes a heavy load." Nurse Butters' face expressed considerable dissatisfaction, and she looked somewhat haughtily at Mrs. Macartney. "Are you planning to go, too?" she asked distantly.

Mrs. Macartney stepped back quickly and then she laughed. "No, not now. I'll be down later. If the doctor is coming right out and you are a trained nurse I should only be in the way. I shan't be needed."

"In nursing I've found out that it isn't the ones who are needed who are always underfoot," Nurse Butters remarked gloomily, with a stern glance at Marietta. "I only hope the springs last. If they don't, it's a good thing we haven't farther to fall," she said more pleasantly as she did something to her engine, and the little runabout started creakily back to the old Knox cottage.

CHAPTER VII

DAVE stood beside the sofa fascinated by Bob Brown's white face and drenched black hair while Helen walked from the back door to the front door with quick nervous steps, stopping as she passed to throw a few more drops of water on the white face. It seemed years to her since Williamina had gone. She thought the doctor would never come, that no one would ever come. Suddenly she gave a little cry and ran down the porch steps.

William had looked at Mr. Brewer's old copy of Samuel Johnson and nodded his head wisely and told Mr. Brewer that it was a mighty nice book whether it was a priceless first edition or not.

"Nice!" roared Mr. Brewer, mortally insulted. "Nice! God bless me, William Kirwin. Men don't buy books like this just because they are nice!"

"Don't they?" William asked innocently. "Well, it's a nice book just the same. I'm glad

you have it. I must run along now. I left Bill with Dave in the road."

"Bill!" snorted Mr. Brewer impatiently. "Maybe you don't know it, William, but you're making yourself several kinds of a fool over that child. A girl who doesn't belong to you——"

"Williamina does belong to me," William interrupted with chill haste. He always was furious when anyone insinuated that Williamina had no claim upon him, and when he was furious his voice was like blue ice.

"Wait until her people find where she is, and you'll see how much she belongs to you," mumbled Mr. Brewer, a trifle ashamed of having lost his temper when William failed to appreciate his shabby old copy of Dr. Johnson.

William sent a quick, suspicious glance to him. "What do you mean? What have you heard?"

Mr. Brewer was honest, if he was peculiar and hot-tempered, so he shook his head. But it seemed to William that he did it reluctantly. "I haven't heard anything, but it stands to reason that you will some day if the paternal feeling is half as strong as I've been led to believe."

"It's almost ten years ago. I made every effort at the time," began William, but Mr. Brewer would not let him finish.

"Don't I know? You needn't tell me. But

the way I have it figured out, you will hear, William. Parents may not mind losing a yowling messy baby, Lord knows, I should think they would want to, but most any father and mother would be willing to keep a child like Bill, old enough to be a help, if she's trained right. I read of a case in a Chicago paper only yesterday, of a woman who was trying to get back the boy she had given away when he was a baby. I'd be ready to give her up, William, I'd be ready."

"Ready to give up Bill!" William could scarcely believe his ears when they told him what Mr. Brewer would be ready to do. "I'll never be that, Mr. Brewer. Why, that—that kid"—he stumbled and swallowed hard—"that kid made the world over for me. I shan't give her up."

"Yes, you will, if her own mother comes and asks for her. I know you, William Kirwin. You'd give your shirt to another man if he told you he needed it."

William frowned. "A shirt isn't Williamina," he said shortly. "Well, Mr. Brewer, I'm off." And he went away quickly, while Mr. Brewer shouted after him that he had never said that Williamina was a shirt.

William took the path up the river bank, because it was shorter than the road, and he wished to see Williamina as soon as possible. That was

why Helen saw him streaking across the old Knox place, and she called loudly.

He stopped at once and came to meet her. Mr. Brewer was quite right. It was not William's way now to refuse help to anyone who needed it. There had been days when he would have streaked right on across the old Knox place and let Helen call. But those days were almost ten years old and not these days, so he turned and walked back to the cottage with her. After that Helen breathed easier. She just transferred Mr. Brown to William's broad shoulders and left William to watch the white face on the sofa.

At last she heard Williamina's voice and Marietta's voice and a third voice which she did not recognize. She jumped up from the steps and ran to meet them. Marietta White and Williamina were running side by side, you could not have told which was ahead, and behind them waddled the fattest woman Helen had ever seen.

"Oh, Helen Spafford!" called Marietta breathlessly. "I'd like to beat you. Why didn't you go with Cousin Sophie and leave me here to succor the wounded? I suppose you've been sitting beside him holding his hand for hours!" she finished enviously.

"I have not!" Helen was indignant. "I left that to Dave and Mr. Kirwin. I've stood with

my back to him. A man in a dead faint, with his face all scratched and bloody, and his clothes torn, is not a pleasant sight."

"Scratched and bloody! The poor dear," cooed Marietta.

Nurse Butters had caught up with them and now she stopped to draw a breath and demand peremptorily: "Where is my patient?"

"Patient?" Helen was bewildered by her size and by her manner. She could only stand and stare at Nurse Butters and wonder how many pounds she weighed.

Williamina pulled her sleeve. "It's the nurse you asked me to get," she whispered. "You know you said you wished I had brought a nurse with Mr. Brown, so I went out and got one. She's registered and trained," she explained proudly. "She told me so herself. And her name is Imogene Grace Butters." She would have gone on and told Helen who the Imogene was for and who the Grace, if Helen had not put her arms around her and hugged her so that she could not speak.

"Williamina," Helen said in her ear, "you're a child in a thousand. You are a perfect fairy godmother."

"No, I'm not!" Williamina pulled herself free. "Fairy godmothers are old and have gray

hair. My hair's yellow." And she put her hand to her hair to make sure that it was still yellow.

"Where," demanded Nurse Butters again, in the deep, deep voice, which made Williamina shiver, it sounded so much like the voice of an ogre, "is my patient?"

Bob Brown never recovered consciousness while William and Nurse Butters carried him into the bedroom in the ell which old Mr. Knox had occupied for so many years. Nurse Butters sniffed at the disorder as she opened windows and pushed the bed forward. It was amazing how easily she moved when she was occupied with her professional duties. There was a certainty, a dignity, an unconsciousness about her that made one have confidence in her. When at last they had the patient between the clean white sheets, Bob Brown opened his eyes and looked into the large round face of Nurse Butters. When he had closed his eyes he had been looking into the fresh creamy face of Helen Spafford. Even if his head was revolving like a merry-go-round he could appreciate the difference.

"Feel better?" Nurse Butters was asking him softly.

He tried to lift his arm and push her away. "Good Lord!" was all he said, but he stared at her in a wide-eyed wondering way, and when she

went out of the room he looked at William until William went nearer.

"What is it?" asked William.

"Do stunning young girls ever get turned into fat old frumps?" asked Bob Brown faintly.

"Often." William put his cool brown hand on Bob Brown's forehead. He thought he was delirious. "In fact, it usually happens."

Bob Brown reached up and pushed the hand away. "No," he said fretfully, "I mean at once, immediately, in the twinkling of an eye, you know?"

Then William knew that he was delirious and smiled at him as he looked steadily into his eyes. "Don't you worry your head about women, old or young," he said firmly. "You just shut your eyes and rest until the doctor comes."

And after a long look into William's eyes and a quick horrified glance at Nurse Butters, who had returned to the room, Bob Brown obediently closed his eyes and rested.

Dr. Grey came with pleasing promptness and everyone felt better when the tall thin figure, somewhat stooped at the shoulders, hastened up the walk. Above Dr. Grey's bent shoulders was a frowning face, but the frown was not too heavy to hide the keenness in the blue eyes nor the kindliness in the firm mouth.

"Gracious me!" murmured Marietta, clutching Helen's arm, "he looks like the rock of Gibraltar in a tempest."

It was Marietta who explained why he had been sent for, and she described the accident as if she had been an eye witness, instead of three-quarters of a mile away.

Dr. Grey listened as he drew his gloves from his long slender hands. He scarcely looked at her, and when she finished he asked, as Nurse Butters had asked, for his patient. Marietta bit her lip and let Helen show him the way to the bedroom, where Nurse Butters received him.

William joined the others on the steps and drew Williamina to him.

"My, the world goes around awfully fast," she said with a tired little sigh. "Such a lot has happened, William, dear, since you went to see Mr. Brewer's priceless old treasure."

"I should say a lot has happened," agreed Marietta, hugging herself because it had. "And not two hours ago I was bemoaning the monotony of country life. Do you suppose that man, Mr. Bob Brown, will be here for the rest of the summer?"

"The rest of the summer!" Helen sat up straight and stared at her.

"Hardly," laughed William. "I expect he can be moved to town tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!" Marietta's face fell. "I shouldn't think he could be moved so soon. He was frightfully hurt, wasn't he?" She turned to Helen. "You were talking about boarders, Helen Spafford," she said quickly, "and Fate has sent you two." She laughed at the boarders Helen had been sent.

"It wasn't Fate sent them. I brought them." Williamina wanted credit for what she had done.

"Unless the doctor objects, and I don't see why he would, I should think you would try and keep this man and his nurse. They'll have to pay board somewhere, and they might as well pay you," went on Marietta.

"Marietta White!" gasped Helen.

"I should," Marietta insisted. "You want to make this place pay something. You're late for lettuce, so why not be early for boarders?"

Helen refused to tell her, so Marietta elaborated an idea which seemed to please her. She even planned Bob Brown's meals, although invalid trays are the province of the nurse, as she should have known. She was still talking of egg-nog and beef tea when the doctor came out and dropped on one of the old sofas as if he welcomed the opportunity of a moment's rest.

"That young man's guardian angel must have

been at his shoulder," he drawled. "I don't see how he escaped being killed."

Marietta's face fell again. "Isn't he very bad?" There was keen disappointment in her voice. She did not wish to be cheated out of those invalid trays.

The doctor grinned. "That depends on what you call bad. A couple of broken ribs, a sprained ankle, strained back that is raw from the neck to the waist and two big cuts on the head might be considered bad by some people."

"Oh!" The disappointment slipped from Marietta's face to make room for—could it be joy? "That's good," she actually said, and as they all looked at her in surprise she explained: "I mean I'm glad he hasn't a broken neck. Will you be able to move him to town?" She hung on his answer.

He frowned. "That depends upon you," he said frankly. "I should like to keep him here. He is in no condition for a twelve-mile ride. Indeed," he went on, as his proposition was not greeted with a storm of objections, "I think I shall insist on his remaining for a while. He won't be much care, for the nurse—where under Heaven did you find her?—will look after him. She tells me you have plenty of room."

"Oh, we have! Loads of room." Marietta was

jubilant. "Tell him so, Helen. There are three bedrooms upstairs. We could accommodate another invalid if you find one in the road. Speak up, Helen," impatiently. "This is your house. I'm only a boarder."

"You're not!" When Helen did speak up, she did it firmly. "We are trying coöperative housekeeping," she told the doctor, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes. It did make her so cross for Marietta to talk as she had. "And, of course, if you think it would be best for your patient to stay, he can stay. As you say, the nurse will take care of him."

"It would be much easier for me to have him in town," the doctor explained. "A ride of twenty-four miles isn't anything I care to add to my day's work, but it will be better for him to stay here for a while. Who is he? Do you know?"

"He is Mr. Brown, Mr. Bob Brown," volunteered Williamina. "He told us just before he fainted."

"I don't know him from Adam." Helen offered her testimony a trifle tartly.

"Oh, yes, you do," Marietta told her promptly. "If the two stood before you, you would have no difficulty in saying, 'This is Mr. Brown and this is Mr. Adam.' You know Mr. Brown at least by

sight. You saw him. He introduced himself." She giggled triumphantly.

That was all true. Helen could not deny one word. "Marietta White!" she began in a choked voice. "Marietta White!" And she stopped. She could not say anything more while Marietta was grinning at her in such an irritating way.

"I don't blame you," the doctor grinned, too. "A bit stimulating, isn't she?" He regarded Marietta as he might have regarded a germ with which he was unfamiliar. "Don't let her near my patient."

"Oh, doctor!" Marietta stopped giggling and whimpered. "Mayn't I go in and smooth his pillow? Mayn't I read poetry to him?"

"You can not. The only woman besides the nurse who can go near him is there." And he pointed straight at Williamina.

"Oh!" Williamina was as surprised as any of them.

"You won't excite him and you may amuse him," explained the doctor. "If you don't, the nurse can turn you out." He stood up and stretched himself wearily. "I've been on the jump since five o'clock this morning. Why don't people live right and do right?" he turned to William and asked fiercely; "And have some mercy on the poor doctors?" Before William could answer

him, he went on in a very different voice. "If you'll come and help we might pull Brown's car, what there is left of it, out of the road."

"And when you have done that I'll have a cup of coffee for you," suggested Helen, touched by the weariness in the doctor's face. She was as much surprised as he was by the offer. She had never intended to make it.

"That's the good Samaritan," he beamed on her. "I only prescribe coffee for one person—myself. And I like it hot and strong."

"We'll do better than that." Marietta was spurred to effort by the approval which had greeted Helen's offer. "We'll have supper for you. It's after six o'clock, and as you said, it is a long way to town. You must have something to eat before you go."

"Coffee will be enough," the doctor said hurriedly. "I don't want to bother——"

"It won't be any bother," Marietta interrupted, speaking carelessly, as if she were in the habit of getting supper for tired doctors every night in the week.

When the men had gone Helen looked at Marietta. "It's all very well to invite people to dinner, but it's just as well to make sure there will be dinner first. Do you know what is in the pantry?"

"Oh, shucks," murmured Marietta. "Do, then think, has ever been my motto. And we will have guests for supper, not dinner, my dear Helen. When you are in the country do as the country does. There must be something in the house to eat." She frowned as she remembered the pantry shelves. There really was not much on them.

"Louis has a pot roast cooking in our house," suggested Williamina, wild to help. "I know he would lend it to you."

Marietta turned and hugged her. "Williamina," she spoke very solemnly, "from this day forth I feel that I have only to mention what I want and you will get it for me. There is not a doubt in my mind that you are a fairy princess. You prove it every minute. Just you keep on giving, and some day you'll get. See if you don't. We'll borrow your pot roast and you and William with it. Dave, you may stay, too, if you wish, but I should suggest that if you do your mother will be left alone."

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CHAPTER VIII

BOBBY BROWN—every one called him Bobby so why shouldn't I?—proved to be an impatient invalid. Before the doctor returned the next day he was asking to be up and dressed in spite of the fact that he could locate each of his bones by a separate and distinct ache and knew that he couldn't be up and dressed. Nurse Butters listened to his complaints for a while and then came to stand beside the bed and regard him with a deeply disapproving face.

"Maybe you think it's hard to have two broken ribs, a sprained ankle, a strained back and two big cuts in your head and have to stay in bed for a few weeks, but what would you say if your back was so bad you had to stay in bed for years?" she wished to know.

Bobby groaned. "Mrs. Job! Don't spring any of that cheerful thank-God-it's-no-worse stuff on a fellow when he's flat," he begged. "A bed may be more comfortable than a coffin but that doesn't make me any more resigned to the bed."

"You'll feel better when you've had something to eat," prophesied Nurse Butters. "You just wait and see."

When she brought the tray with its bowl of broth, its glass of milk and its infinitesimal squares of toast with two wild roses beside the napkin, Bobby's face did brighten.

"Which one of the pretty queens sent me this posy?" He took the flowers in his fingers and sniffed their fresh fragrance.

"The little one. Williamina they call her." Nurse Butters deftly moved a pillow beneath his head.

Bobby dropped the flowers. "The kid! Are you sure?" He hoped she wasn't. It might be kind of Williamina to put a wild rose on his tray but it was neither interesting nor romantic.

"Of course I'm sure." Nurse Butters' confident voice left no doubt. "She came in just as I had the tray fixed, and she had those roses in her hand. 'Perhaps your friend would like these with his breakfast. I'd be glad to give them to him,' she said. So I let her put them there. They looked real pretty to me even if they ain't hothouse orchids." She eyed him sternly as if she thought they should have looked pretty to him.

"Very kind of her." Pretty as they were,

Bobby was not enthusiastic over his flowers. "I say, nurse, who are these people who have taken me in? Know anything about them?"

"Not so much as I will," Nurse Butters admitted with real regret. "But considerably more'n I did yesterday," she added with satisfaction.

"Fire away," ordered Bobby, as he sipped his broth through "a confounded glass tube."

And Nurse Butters obediently told him all she knew about Helen.

"The black and white sketch?" questioned Bobby, with a grin. "My word, but she did look good to me yesterday! She doesn't live here alone, does she?"

And then Nurse Butters told him all she knew of Marietta, whom he had not seen but whose voice had come to him occasionally when Marietta was too interested in conversation to remember that there was an invalid in the house. He liked Marietta's voice immensely.

"She sounds good to me," murmured Bobby Brown. "Any more?"

And then Nurse Butters told him what she knew of Williamina and William, which was not much. Nurse Butters did not forget to mention Mrs. Macartney and Dave. The only reason she did not speak of old Mr. Brewer and Danny

Simms was because she had not heard of them.

"Well, well!" Bobby finished his broth as she finished her story. "It seems like a pleasant little colony. The black and white one may sit with me this afternoon, and the red-headed torpedo may come in this evening."

"That," remarked Nurse Butters with cruel brevity, "is for the doctor to say."

And the doctor said a most emphatic no. Bobby was to have no visitors but William, who had offered to stay with him during the nurse's hour off. If he pined for feminine society Williamina might be admitted to the sick room but no one over ten.

"Too exciting," Dr. Grey concluded. "We want to keep your temperature down, not send it up."

"I don't see how you have the heart to condemn me to solitary confinement," grumbled Bobby, actually disappointed, although he could have expected nothing else.

"It isn't solitary confinement. You have your nurse."

"Worse than solitary confinement." Bobby corrected his first statement with a groan.

The doctor looked at him with disgust. "You're a grateful beggar, aren't you? Here you are, picked out of the road and dropped in

the lap of luxury, provided with a good nurse, a splendid doctor, and still you grumble. It would have been a good thing if the little girl had left you twined around that pine tree."

"You and the Butters evidently belong to the same cheerful uplift society. Well, I don't, and I'm not going to join. At the same time I admit that I owe something to the kid. She did bring me here. You may call it the lap of luxury, if you please," he looked scornfully around poor old Mr. Knox's dreary room, "and she did provide me with a nurse and a doctor, but in spite of all that, I shall not rise and sing 'Glory, Glory Hallelujah.' "

"You couldn't if you wanted to," was the unsympathetic response. "So you might as well stop kicking."

"Because kicking never put a man on his feet yet," sneered Bobby. "All right, I'll do what you say today. I'm too sore to object, but I think you're a selfish brute. You can go and talk to those girls, but I have to stay here with Nurse Butters."

"You're lucky—" began the doctor all over again.

Bobby raised a protesting hand. "If you say another word like that I'll take my broken ribs and my strained back and go home," he muttered

savagely. "It's more than a suffering man can stand. I am not thankful that I was not broken in two, and I am not glad that I have a soft bed to lie on. If you can't think of anything else to say, go on out and make merry. Leave me in the tomb with Jailor Butters."

The doctor frowned and then laughed. It was impossible to do anything else even if Bobby Brown did refuse to be grateful and thankful over his mercies and would dwell upon his misfortunes. Dr. Grey looked around the room, which was not a bit like any tomb, although the decorations and furnishings were of a type which had been popular a generation ago. But the windows faced the river and were wide open to let in the sun and the soft river breeze which ruffled Bobby's black hair. Each window framed a charming vista of rippling water dimpling in the sunlight between drooping willows or low bushes. The room did not agree with Dr. Grey's idea of a tomb any more than it tallied with Bobby's conception of the lap of luxury.

Later in the afternoon, when Bobby had wakened from a long nap, which was refreshing enough to make him feel even more restless and rebellious, he turned his head and saw Williamina sitting in old Mr. Knox's chair beside the bed.

"Hello," he said languidly. "How did you get in?"

"On the tips of my toes." She slipped from the chair to stand beside him. "Nurse Butters said I could come and talk to you if I came in very quietly. So I pretended I was a fairy and slipped in on a sunbeam, only it was really the tips of my toes." She spoke apologetically, as if he had every right to expect her to enter by the sunbeam way.

"I see." He looked at her flushed eager face and round yellow head, which she tossed every now and then as if an unruly lock of hair threatened her eyes, as one often did. "You're the little girl who brought me here?"

She nodded. "Dave helped me. I gave you to Miss Spafford."

He laughed. "Oh, you gave me away, did you? Why?"

"I thought perhaps you might know how to grow lettuce," she answered soberly. "Oh, do you? Miss Spafford does need a man to help her grow lettuce."

"Why?" he asked again. "And who is Miss Spafford?" He remembered very well the tall slim girl with the startled face, who had stood beside him just as he made a fool of himself and fainted. If he closed his eyes he could see her again.

Williamina was quite willing to tell him all she knew of Helen, which was more than Nurse Butters knew. "She's like the Princess Snowwhite," she said dreamily, "with hair as black as night and skin as white as snow and lips as red as blood."

"She is," murmured Bobby Brown. "Go on!"

And when Williamina had told him all she knew about Helen he asked her about Marietta. Perhaps she would know more of her than Nurse Butters did.

"What heroine is she like?"

Williamina thought for a moment. "The Princess Goldilocks," she said at last. "Although her hair is browner than it is gold but she has such lots of it. She said she was a candle that is burned at both ends, but I looked at one end and there wasn't any flame nor any smoke. I meant to ask William what she meant but I forgot." She waited for a second as if she thought Bobby Brown might explain, but as he didn't, she went on to tell him more about Marietta. And when she had told him all she knew of her she would have told him all about Nurse Butters, but Bobby stopped her just as she had explained that Nurse Butters' name was Imogene Grace and that the Imogene was for her father's mother and the Grace——

"That's enough about Nurse Butters." Bobby was firm and ungrateful. "We'll pass her for the present. What's your name?"

Williamina beamed as she told him who she was and how William had found her like Moses in the bulrushes and how they had lived happy ever after. Bobby stared at her.

"That's a rum story," he murmured. "And you don't know who you really are?"

"That's the best part," joyously. "For as long as I don't know I can imagine I'm anyone I please. Today," she smoothed her gingham skirt with complacent fingers, "I'm a king's daughter."

Bobby stared harder. What a rum little thing she was!

"But wouldn't you rather have a real father?" He was really curious and sympathetic, and it showed in his voice.

Williamina shook her head until one of her black hair ribbons fell off. "I should say not! A real father wouldn't be half as nice as a pretend one that I can change when I please. Not even if he were a real king. I should say not! Why, you know yourself, Mr. Brown, that there are lots and lots of kings you'd be ashamed to have for a father. There's Nero, you know, and old King Herod and King John and, oh, yes, Henry the Eighth. You wouldn't have wanted

"What do you know about Henry the Eighth?" he asked with a chuckle.

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to be Henry the Eighth's little girl, would you?"

Bobby raised a hand to his bandaged head. And the doctor had forbidden exciting conversation. "What do you know about Henry the Eighth?" he asked with a chuckle.

"I know all about him," with superb confidence. "I can read, and I have William to tell me things. You'd be surprised how much I know."

Bobby laughed. "I'm surprised now," he said with a heartiness which Williamina appreciated. He was also surprised at how much Williamina and her story interested him.

"Poor little kid," he said to himself when she had slipped away. "She should have a real father and a real mother. Gee whizz! somebody's heart must have broken when she got tangled in the bulrushes."

He asked Nurse Butters what she knew and Nurse Butters deeply regretted that she did not know more than she did. She heartily agreed that it was a shame that a child like Williamina should not have a normal home and parents. They thought that there must be parents for her somewhere, and they vowed that they would do what they could to find them.

"I wonder—" Nurse Butters said suddenly. "I had a case in Waloo nine years ago, and I remember Mrs. Smith's sister told me something

about a child disappearing in a mysterious way. Mrs. Smith had erysipelas and was a hard patient. It would be funny now, wouldn't it, if she should know Williamina's father? I remember it was nine years ago because I had my fortieth birthday when I was with Mrs. Smith. You don't forget your fortieth birthday any more than you do your twentieth," she told him. "And Mrs. Smith made a great fuss because she gave me a handkerchief case somebody had given her the Christmas before, and she didn't like it. If I had her address I'd write to her tonight."

"Can't you get it?"

"I'll try and remember." That was the most she could promise. "Miss White's looking for Williamina's folks, too."

"Good work. I wonder if Kirwin's holding anything back? I'll sound him the next time he comes."

"Oh, you mustn't do that," Nurse Butters objected quickly. "He's crazy about Williamina. He wouldn't want to live without her. Miss White said so. She says it ain't right for a man to be so wild about a child who isn't his own child."

"Oh, Miss White said all that, did she?" He smiled at his thoughts. "Well, you tell Miss White I agree with her. I'm on her side al-

though I think Kirwin's too old for her voice. But I want that kid to have a real home."

Williamina's story gave him something to think of besides himself, and every time she came to see him, which was at least once a day, he found himself feeling sorry for the man and woman who should have had her. Williamina read to him from her own books, fairy tales, Stevenson's verses or her beloved Alice. She read well, with much expression, and he had to listen, for she was constantly interrupting herself to comment on this or that. The fairy world was very real to her. She would not have been surprised any minute to see a bent little woman, with a mob cap on her gray hair, sail in through the open window on a broom stick to grant her dearest wish.

"William said everybody was sent into the world with a wish," she told him one day with a far-away look in her blue eyes. "And you can spend it when you please and how you please but you won't ever have another. I haven't spent mine yet. I'm saving it. William spent his long ago, and he didn't get anything for it at all. Have you spent yours?" eagerly.

"I don't think I ever had one," he began, but she interrupted quickly:

"Yes, you did. Everyone has at least one wish. You get it when you're born. William said so.

You can have anything you want in this world if you don't want more than one thing. That's the trouble, William said. Most people want too much or else they waste their wish like the old woman in the book, who wished the pudding on her husband's nose. I'm stingy with my wish. I'm so afraid I won't get something I can keep forever and ever that I don't spend it at all. I used to think I'd trade it for glass slippers like Cinderella's, and then I thought how easy they'd break, and next I wanted a parrot that would talk to me when William was away, but it might die. And then I wanted a box of chocolates that would never be empty so long as I lived, and then William sent away for a big box, and I ate so many I was sick and Mrs. Macartney had to come and dose me. And now I'm glad I never spent my wish, for there's going to be a circus in Mifflin, and if you look at the billboard at Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler's store you'll see you'll get a lot for a wish at a circus. It's—it's so comforting to know you have a wish in your pocket when you want anything. I've been afraid I couldn't go to the circus, but now I've remembered my wish, of course, I shall. And William, too. I've never seen a circus in all the days of my life. Dave has. He said there was nothing like it."

"I expect that's true. There isn't anything like it for a boy," agreed Bobby.

"For a girl, too?" she asked jealously. "I want to like it just as much as Dave if I spend the only wish I'll ever have for it."

"You'll like it," he promised. "How about Miss Spafford and Miss White, Williamina? Have they spent their wishes?"

"I don't know." Williamina was sorry she didn't know. "I'll ask them."

But when she asked them she found that they, like Bobby Brown, did not know about a wish which could be carried in the pocket and spent when you pleased.

"One wish, Williamina?" said Marietta. "How stingy. Why, I want dozens of things, just dozens of them."

"That's so silly, Williamina." Helen spoke impatiently. "You can't have what you want in this world."

"You can!" Williamina forgot how rude it is to contradict, and contradicted Helen flatly. "William said so. But you can have only one thing, and that's the trouble. Most people are like Marietta. They want everything."

"What's your wish, Williamina? I expect you want a father and a mother like other little girls?"

"A father and mother!" The curl of Williamina's upper lip, the scorn in Williamina's voice, told Helen what Williamina thought of fathers and mothers. "Why, I have William. I'm not going to spend my wish for any old father and mother. I'm going to spend it on the circus. William will tell me I'm foolish and extravagant but sometimes you just have to be foolish and extravagant."

When she had gone Marietta looked at Helen, and Helen looked at Marietta.

"Isn't it strange how satisfied she is with William?" Marietta asked.

"Oh, I don't think that is so strange," Helen said quickly, and she flushed. "William's rather extraordinary, you know," she added quickly. "But I should think she would want her own mother."

"It's because she has never known her mother that she doesn't," frowned Marietta. "What does she know of family life in this hole with no one but Louis and William? No wonder she would rather have a circus. But that isn't normal, Helen. Williamina isn't a normal child. And William isn't normal. I've said that before, and you'll probably hear me say it again. My word! I wish I could find Williamina's own family and put her into it."

"You said you were going to do it." Helen reminded Marietta of the William Kirwin Rescue League which she had organized and there was something in her voice which told Marietta also, that she had been decidedly negligent in accomplishing the aim and object of the league.

"So I did. And I shall. I'll write to a friend of mine, a newspaper woman who knows everything that has happened in this state for the last fifteen years. If Williamina ever had a family Josephine Meacham will know," confidently. "I'll write tonight."

"Write now," begged Helen, turning pink again. "I have to go over to Wobbler's," she explained. "And I can mail it there. It will go quicker than if you drop it in our box and wait for the R. F. D."

CHAPTER IX

IT isn't fair, Williamina, for you to have all the men," grumbled Marietta. "First you snatch William and now Bobby Brown. It isn't fair."

"It isn't my fault William found me first," began Williamina indignantly, for it wasn't, and she did not think she should be blamed for what was not her fault. "And it isn't my fault the doctor lets me talk to Mr. Brown."

"Perhaps it isn't," yawned Marietta. "But the result is the same. And what are Helen and I to do? Only two men within twelve miles and both of them snatched by a girl of ten. It's ridiculous."

There was nothing ridiculous about it to Williamina. Her lip quivered, and her forehead puckered into a frown. "You forgot the doctor," she reminded Marietta with as much dignity as she could muster. "You may have him."

Marietta laughed scornfully. "The doctor!" she sneered. "Who wants an animated telegraph pole with a pill box for a mind?" Marietta

sparred with the doctor every time he came to the cottage, which was once a day.

He would drive up the road in his dusty roadster and tramp through the garden to enter by the kitchen door. In vain Marietta explained that there was a front door for visitors, that only tradesmen and tramps used a back door; in vain she pinned a notice—"Please go around to the other door"—over the kitchen entrance; the doctor still came in that way to find them washing dishes, cooking, busy with their housework. He would give them a curt good morning and go on to see his patient.

"Unmannerly bear," Marietta would murmur, crinkling her nose in disgust.

But on his return Dr. Grey invariably dropped into the old rocking chair and sat and sat, and talked—or listened, rather—to Marietta talk. They differed on suffrage, the right to self-expression, to personal freedom, and on almost every other subject but the edibility of fresh cake or cookies. Both ate their full share of either.

"You don't eat the right things," the doctor dared to say sharply to Marietta one afternoon when she had eaten more than her share of a crisp little jumble. "You haven't asked for my advice, but I'm going to give it to you just the same. Your color's bad. You don't breathe right

and you fidget eternally. If you want to avoid a complete nervous breakdown and put the roses back in your cheeks you'll turn over a new leaf. Housework's the finest exercise in the world for a woman. You let Miss Spafford do more than her share."

There were plenty of roses in Marietta's cheeks as she stared at him. "Thank you for nothing," she said with a toss of her head. "If I want roses I know where to get them. I have them by the bushel in a little box on my dresser this very minute."

"If you have any sense you'll leave them in the box on your dresser," answered the doctor. "It passes my comprehension why any girl thinks a man likes to see her face painted like a billboard."

Marietta was so angry that she almost choked. "Girls don't paint their faces to please the men," she managed to gasp. Marietta would have to be very angry indeed before she would refuse to snatch at the last word.

The doctor elevated his nose then. "Who do they expect to please if not the men?" he wanted to know at once and with much scorn.

"Themselves!" Marietta told him promptly and coldly.

"Then they are bigger fools than I have al-

vays thought them," was the equally cool re-
oinder.

Marietta's mouth opened for a tart reply, and hen she closed it and kept it closed by the ex-
›enditure of a mighty effort. She would not give ıim the satisfaction of an answer. She would treat him with silent contempt. But how she did dislike him. She never had disliked a man as she did this tall young doctor with his shock of sandy hair and frowning face. She wrote a note to Bobby Brown and put it in the pocket of Nurse Butters' apron:

"Your doctor is a brute. Why don't you discharge him?"

And Bobby Brown chuckled as he read it and asked for a pencil and a sheet of paper that he might answer it.

"I didn't engage him, so I can't discharge him. It's up to you."

But if the doctor sparred and argued with Marietta he never did either with Helen. They had long, long talks together on many subjects.

"Busy man, your friend, the doctor," Marietta would laugh. "Hasn't he any other patients? Poor Bobby Brown! I hope he will be able to pay his bill."

"Why, Marietta White!" Helen would exclaim in injured surprise.

She did like to talk to the doctor. She never fenced nor argued for the pure joy of arguing as Marietta did. She might be a feminist to her toes but she didn't insist on telling you so. She was far more willing to listen to other people while Marietta was so anxious to express her views that she never wished to listen. Time hung heavy on Marietta's hands, and she devoted quite a few of the leaden minutes to the amusement of Bobby Brown. She edited a daily journal on a sheet of letter paper and filled it with foolish items concerning Mrs. Macartney's chickens, Williamina's animal loan bureau, the rights of vegetables, and always there was a scathing editorial on the modern medical man. Williamina delivered the paper, and how Bobby roared when he read it. He showed it to the doctor, and the two chuckled over Marietta's gossip and especially over her scathing opinion of the modern medical man.

"Good mind that girl has," the doctor said, as he folded the paper and put it in his pocket. "Only she knows it."

"They all know it," grumbled Bobby. "That's the trouble with girls now. They think they are so much cleverer than the men. What are we going to do with them, doctor? When may I see some one beside Nurse Butters and the kid?

I know the Butters' family, root and branch, and I'm getting fed up with fairies. I never believed in them anyway. I'd be the better for a brush with our editor. Let me see her and the other one," he begged.

"Not yet. You are doing very well as you are. Time enough for girls when you are on your feet again."

"Miss White is right, and you are a brute!" groaned his patient. "Who wished you on me, anyway?"

But in spite of Bobby's grumbling the days were really not unbearably long and he was getting better every minute. In return for Marietta's newspaper he dictated to Williamina what he called "The Autobiography of a Stray," the life story of one Robert Brown, struggling electrical engineer of Waloo. And Marietta giggled as she read that Robert Brown was twenty-seven years old, a graduate of Cornell; that his favorite color was pink, his favorite actress, Elsie Janis; that he much preferred any Shaw to Bernard, and that he hadn't any use for poetry that Robert Service had not written; that he was at present a homeless orphan, as his father, the only other member of his immediate family, was fishing up in Labrador, and that he was just running around the state to kill time and find ad-

venture, both of which ambitions he had handsomely achieved, when he was thrown around a pine tree. Williamina's proud young fingers ached before she had written half of what Bobby dictated.

"It's very interesting," she observed as she licked the ink from her finger. "Is that the end?"

"There is no end, Williamina," Bobby observed solemnly. "Life goes on and on, just one thing after another, you know."

"Like the river." Williamina could observe also. "Nothing goes on more than the Mississippi."

Williamina was often at the cottage. She slipped up whenever she could, and William let her go.

"It's good for her to be with those girls," Mrs. Macartney told him. "She needs some one younger than we are."

William was at the cottage himself quite a bit. One afternoon Helen took him up to the neglected garden to ask him what on earth she was to do with it, while the yellow dog gamboled awkwardly about them.

"It's stupid of me not to remember more of Mr. Knox's methods," William said with a frown. "I watched him often enough to know how to

make a garden, but I don't know. All I remember is that he put in the seed and then harvested the crop and sent it to market and got back big checks."

"That's what I want to do—get big checks," Helen explained eagerly. "I've been reading all Cousin Peter's old books on gardening, but I must be stupid, for they don't mean much to me. It's too late for most things I find. If I decide to keep the place I suppose I should go to the agricultural school and learn how to run it properly. But it seems a shame not to raise at least a few radishes this summer."

"You couldn't do much yourself. You look better than you did when you came but you are not what Nurse Butters calls real rugged yet. Better take things easy this year and then next summer go at it in earnest."

"That sounds all right, but I hate waste, time and gardens and everything," vaguely. "I wish I knew whether I should like farming? I know I hate teaching. And one shouldn't do the work one hates, should one?"

"One shouldn't," laughed William. "Don't worry about next year, Miss Spafford. Borrow a leaf from Williamina's book and 'give' this summer. Then in the fall see what you will get."

"Oh, Williamina!" Helen shrugged her shoul-

ders. "Her idea is all very well for a child, but we know better."

But William did not look as if he knew better, for he shook his head. "Children know more than grown people about a lot of things," he said soberly.

Helen did not argue that, instead, she said hurriedly: "I depend upon you, Mr. Kirwin. You know I'm so alone in the world. I haven't any one to advise me, and I do trust you." Her voice shook when she told him how she trusted and depended upon him.

"Sure, I'll help you all I can." William's words were all she could have asked, but he never looked at her, and as she looked at him she was not sure that he had heard her. He was gazing down toward the river where a flutter of plaid gingham could be seen among the willows. "Is that Bill? The little imp. I'll just remind her that she owes me three days' practicing. Good-by, Miss Spafford."

And without so much as a glance he went off and left her with the yellow dog, while she stood and stared after him. She was so indignant that the hot tears flew to her smarting eyes. He had left her for Williamina, a chit of a girl. She almost hated Williamina. She had never been interested in a man as she was interested in Wil-

liam. She had been interested in him ever since he had been to her only miles and miles of khaki and blue flannel and her interest had grown and grown. At first there had been a mystery to rouse her curiosity and later there was a puzzle to hold it. She could not keep her eyes from William when he was near. They followed him with a wistful, hungry appeal, and William kept his eyes on—Williamina. He never seemed to see anyone else when Williamina was about. No wonder Helen almost hated her.

As Helen had told William that first day, she knew no men in Waloo. William was twenty years older than she was and there was far more gray than brown in his hair, but that only made him more romantic. It made Helen feel all bubbley and sparkley to be near him. "I'm crazy about William Kirwin," Marietta said to anyone who would listen. Helen could not tell even herself what she thought of William without blushing. She understood now why she had obeyed an impulse that first night when she had looked into the mirror and murmured "baby face" to the reflection there, and why she wore her hair so that she looked five years older than she was. She wished she could wear it so that she looked ten years older. She wanted William to admire, that was the word she used, her as she admired him.

So it was not strange that she bitterly resented the fact that he had left her for a ten-year-old child in a plaid gingham. The wave of jealousy which swept over her was so fierce that she shut her eyes for a moment. When she opened them again she saw Williamina run to William, saw him catch her in his arms. The color rushed to Helen's cheeks in an angry flood. She pushed away the yellow dog and stamped her foot.

"Darn!" she exclaimed furiously. The world she lived in had suddenly turned from a rosy pink to a dark and bilious green.

CHAPTER X

WILLIAM'S world was not green, not an inch of it. There was not a cloud in his sky as he walked along the river bank with Williamina's grimy little paw in his big fist. And then suddenly, in the twinkling of any eye, without any warning, the color of his sky did change from a deep heavenly blue taffeta to a dingy gray cotton flannel.

"William, why is everybody asking me if I don't want a father or a mother?" Williamina had asked, as she skipped a pebble out over the surface of the Mississippi.

William stopped short. "Who is asking you?" he wanted to know at once.

"Oh, everybody." Williamina might be a little vague in the beginning, but she gathered coherency as she went on. "Miss Helen asked me and Marietta and Mr. Brown and Nurse Butters and even Dr. Grey. All these new friends. They look at me and say 'poor lamb!' At least Nurse Butters does. Am I a poor lamb, William, dear?"

"You are not! You are a brave independent little girl who will grow into a brave independent woman." William's voice was like the growl of Father Bear.

"Even Miss Helen said it," repeated Williamina sadly. Perhaps her belief that she was the most fortunate little girl in the world was being undermined. Constant dropping, we are told, will wear away the hardest stone and, goodness knows, a belief in one's luck is seldom composed of guaranteed cement. "She said: 'Poor dear, if only I could find your father and mother for you!' "

"She did?" William stopped again and looked down three feet to the top of her yellow head. "Did the others say they would like to find your mother for you?"

Williamina nodded. "Every one of them, even Nurse Butters. I heard her tell Mr. Brown that she was almost sure my own father's name was Horace Mills and he lived in Bayview because once when she was nursing in Bluff, which is near Bayview, you know, she heard that a Mr. and Mrs. Mills in Bayview had lost their baby in a peculiar way." Sometimes Williamina told a story as if she were a hundred instead of ten and this was one of the times. "She couldn't remember whether the baby was a boy or a girl nor

what the peculiar way was but she's written to a woman who knows and if I am Mr. Horace Mills' child, I'm a very lucky little girl, so I am." Unconsciously Williamina imitated Nurse Butters deep voice and the solemn nod of the head with which Nurse Butters punctuated a sentence. But William did not laugh. He did not even smile.

"She did, eh?" he muttered after he had said "Nurse Butters" and another word which Williamina was never allowed to use. "What are the rest of them doing?" he asked after a minute.

"Well, as far as I know," Williamina squeezed his hand and took a couple of dancing steps beside him, "they are all trying to find mothers for me, but I don't want them to, William, darling. You are all the family I've ever had or ever want." She squeezed his fingers harder and he squeezed her fingers, but he said never a word. "You don't have to take everything that's given to you, do you, William?" she asked suddenly, not dancing now. "I'm—I'm just a little bit frightened, I think," she faltered. "You know I've always wanted so much that I've given and I've given. And now Miss Helen says a family is the best thing that can be given to a little girl and she wants me to have one. But I don't have to take it when I don't want it, do I, William?" She

looked up at him, her eyes eagerly imploring him to say she didn't.

"Damn busybodies!" muttered William, as he stooped to put his arms around Williamina. "There are more people in the world minding other people's business than there are minding their own. That's why there's so much room at the top. No, Bill, you don't have to take anything you don't want," he pressed her troubled face against his. "And as for families—I've known families I wouldn't have as a gift. I should say I had! And you don't have to take one, either. And anyway, you have a family. You have *me!*" The pronoun sounded like an explosion.

"But is that the same?" Williamina wasn't at all sure that it was. "You weren't born in my family, William, dear. Miss Helen said so. She said a born family is what the Lord meant you to belong to." There were tears in her eyes and tears in her voice.

"Then why did the Lord take you away from your born family and put you in the bulrushes and send me to find you? You haven't forgotten that, have you, Bill?"

No, Williamina hadn't forgotten. She never could forget, and the tears left her voice and her eyes at once. She hugged William before she

said jubilantly: "That's the same or better, isn't it?"

"Better!" William was most emphatic. "Far better!"

All the same he knew it wasn't better, as he walked along the river bank with Williamina's grimy little paw in his big fist. He had no legal claim to Williamina. He had done all a man could do to find her family nine years ago but because he had failed then was no reason why some interfering fools—it was thus he thought of them all, these people who had just come into his life—might not unearth something which would make him and Williamina mighty uncomfortable if nothing else.

"Oh, Lord, why can't people mind their own affairs," he thought. He thought worse things than that until he suddenly lifted Williamina into the seventh heaven by asking quickly: "How would you like to run away, Bill?"

Williamina squealed before she stopped to look up the three feet to his face. "With you?" she asked. She shouldn't like to run away with anyone but William.

"Sure, with me. Just us two. No one else."

Then Williamina took three dancing steps and said breathlessly, "I'd love it! Could we— Oh, William, could we run to the circus? I've almost

decided to spend my wish on a circus. It seems as if it would be something I'd be glad of as long as I lived."

"Tut, tut," rebuked William. "A circus is all very well, and perhaps we'll run right into it, but no circus is good enough for a girl to spend the only wish she will ever have on it. Just imagine if you had a whole menagerie, lions and tigers and elephants, on the end of your nose!"

"I shouldn't wish for them on the end of my nose—never! I think that old woman was a silly to wish her pudding on anyone's nose. I meant I'd just wish to go and take you with me."

But William still shook his head. "When you've spent your wish you can't have another," he reminded her solemnly.

"I know." Williamina was solemn, too. "That's why I've been so stingy with it. Miss Helen thought it was awful funny that I hadn't spent it on a mother."

"We'll go the first thing in the morning," William hurried to say then. "You won't have time to say goodby to anyone. It's lucky I got gasoline today. We'll pack up whatever Louis has in the pantry——"

"And my new shoes," joyfully. "I couldn't run away without them."

"And your new shoes and my old pipe and start for an indefinite stay."

"What's that? What's an indefinite stay?" Williamina just had to know what it was.

"It may be for a week and it may be forever," explained William, making an indefinite stay a lovely mystery. "We'll start at sunrise, Bill."

"Let's run home and pack?" Williamina caught his hand again, and they ran along the path and up the steps of the shack to find old Danny Simms waiting for them.

"I got a fish hook in my hand, Mr. Kirwin," he said. "I come right to you to cut it out." And he held out his great right hand so that William might see how the hook was imbedded in the flesh.

It was not the first fish hook William had cut out for the fishermen and the clammers, and he was usually glad to help them but just then he wanted to pack. Williamina wanted to pack, too, but instead she ran for the little medicine chest.

"The first thing in the morning I'll come back," Danny said when the hook was out and the wound bathed in an antiseptic and the hand bandaged. "I can't run no chance of having blood-poisoning in the only right hand I got. I want you to look at it tomorrow."

Williamina started to speak but William put his finger over her lips.

"There isn't any danger of blood-poisoning, Simms," he said.

"I ain't taking no chances with the only right hand I got," insisted Danny. "I'll be along in the morning."

"Who'll fix his hand in the morning?" Williamina asked as Danny stumbled down the path to his boat.

"I don't know," William said shortly. "Come to dinner. Louis has called us twice."

Before they had finished the strawberry shortcake Louis had made them for dessert, Mr. Brewer knocked at the door and then pushed it open and came out on the porch.

"It's going to rain pitchforks and broomsticks or I'm a jack rabbit," he said as he took a chair. "Hello, Bill." He always called her Bill, as William did, but it was because he wished to forget that she was a woman child. "Thank you, Louis, I will have a little shortcake."

"Oh, I hope it isn't going to rain!" Williamina looked at the sky across which the big black clouds were hurrying wildly as if they were driving the little white fleecy clouds home. Before Mr. Brewer had finished his shortcake there was the heavy roll of thunder and the sharp flash

of lightning. A moment later and the rain came down in a heavy sheet that sent them indoors.

"I shall have to stay all night," Mr. Brewer said as he found the most comfortable chair in the room. "But I don't care. It gets a little lonesome for me up there with no one but old Hoskins for company."

"Where's your nephew?" Williamina turned from the window where she had been watching the lightning and trying to decipher the messages the angels were flashing. "You said he was coming to see you. I should think he would be better company than Hoskins."

"You can't tell." Mr. Brewer refused to make a definite statement. "It's a strange thing, William, but I haven't heard a word from that boy since he wrote that he'd be along in two or three days. That's over two weeks ago."

"Perhaps he changed his mind." William lighted his pipe and puffed contentedly. "Perhaps he didn't think you were very cordial. He's probably gone somewhere else, but he might have sent you word."

Mr. Brewer snorted scornfully. "You can't expect any consideration from young people. They don't think of anyone but themselves. Oh, I don't worry, but I am curious. I don't care a

picayune whether he comes or not, he can please himself, but I can't lose him altogether."

"Why can't you?" Williamina had the question ready as soon as Mr. Brewer put a period to his sentence.

"I'd be afraid to meet his mother when I go to Heaven." He pulled her ear. "Listen to that, will you?" For the rain was coming down with all its might and main. You might have thought the shack was being bombarded.

Williamina listened, but when she spoke again it was of another subject. "We're going to run away," she remarked pleasantly.

"Who's going to run away?" His keen eyes made her tell him.

"William and I and the motor boat!" She raised herself on her toes and dropped back again with a joyful squeal.

"We're just going away for a few days' camp," explained William carelessly.

"I've a mind to go with you," Mr. Brewer said when he had been told a little more. "I declare I shall go! And then if that boy comes he can find that other people can make plans, too. He should have written me again."

William had not expected to take anyone but Williamina. There really was no objection to Mr. Brewer. He was not eternally upsetting

Williamina by talking of her people. He seldom talked to her at all. He just let her alone.

"Louis will look after my animals," went on Williamina, still balancing herself on her toes. "I haven't very many now. I'm awful low on dogs. I gave the next to the last one to a tramp this very morning. I don't think he wanted a dog, but when I asked if he had any responsibility, he said no, and he looked as if he needed one. The dog liked him. It's funny that dogs like men better than ladies." And she frowned because they did.

"Shows their sense." Mr. Brewer understood the canine preference perfectly. "I'd take an old tramp every day rather than a woman."

"My dog went right up and kissed his boots. They were torn and dirty, but he didn't care. I gave the man a lot of bread and two cold chops and a piece of cake and six of my pennies to buy the dog a bone to remember me by."

"Williamina, how often must I tell you not to give money to a tramp?" It was not often that William spoke to her so sharply.

"It was only six pennies, and he said he hadn't a cent," pouted Williamina.

"I don't care whether he had a cent or not, you are never to give them money."

"It's my very own," she insisted.

"My Lord, how sex does show." Mr. Brewer quite enjoyed the little argument. "It's always their own money they want to throw away. Some day you'll find, friend William, that you have been nourishing a viper."

"We haven't any vipers here," Williamina told him quickly. "You can't trust them. Look at Adam and Eve. We wouldn't keep a snake, would we, William?"

"We would not." William patted her head, their difference forgotten.

"But there are snakes in the circus. We're going to run into it, Mr. Brewer. William said perhaps we would."

The circus was a safer subject. It astonished Williamina to hear how many circuses Mr. Brewer had attended. He remembered them all with a detail and affection that made William chuckle. It was in the midst of a description of one of these circuses that Dave came in, scattering raindrops right and left.

"Mother sent me down," he said, "to ask you to come up the first thing in the morning, William. Something's the matter with the hens."

"I'll bet there is," murmured Mr. Brewer. "There's sure to be trouble with the hens in a storm like this. I bet the old roosters aren't making any fuss."

"Oh, William!" she cried, holding out her rain-wet hands.

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"We can't come the first thing," began Williamina, but William put his hand over her mouth.

"What's the matter with the hens, Dave?" he asked.

"I don't know, and mother doesn't know. She's scared. She doesn't know if you'll know, but she wants you to come the first thing in the morning."

"You tell her to call up old man Gleason. He knows more about hens than I do. I shouldn't be able to help her."

"Do you mean you won't come?" Never before, so long as Dave could remember, had William refused to come.

"He can't," cried Williamina. And before William could put a reminding hand over her lips again, she had told Dave that she and William were going to run away the first thing in the morning.

"I'll go with you," offered Dave, before she had finished. "I'm tired of it here. Let's go up the Ripaway, William. There's dandy trout fishing up there, and it isn't all preserved."

William looked bewildered. His party was growing faster than he wished, but after all Dave would do no harm, and it would be good for the boy to get away for a while.

"Sure your mother doesn't need you?" he asked feebly.

Dave was sure. "She said this morning she wished she knew where to send me for a change. She'll be glad to hear I've gone with you. Louis can tell her." And he sat down as if he only waited for the word to start.

"Don't you have to pack?" Williamina could not understand why he did not wish to make some preparation. "I'm going to take my best shoes and the malty kitten that isn't very well."

"I haven't any best shoes, and I wouldn't be bothered with them if I had." Dave elevated a scornful nose at the thought of taking best shoes on a camping trip. "I shan't take anything but William's fishing tackle that he's going to loan me. You'll let me have an old pole, won't you, William?"

Before William could tell him that he would there was a knock on the door. William opened it. Marietta White stood on the threshold, the rain beating on her uncovered head.

"Oh, Lord!" muttered Mr. Brewer, looking around for a place to hide.

But Marietta never glanced his way. "Oh, William!" she cried, holding out her rain-wet hands. "You must come at once. Our patient is drowning! The roof of the cottage is leaking frightfully."

CHAPTER XI

MR. BREWER promptly disappeared from sight if not from hearing.

"William," he whispered hoarsely, from somewhere in the room, "mind your own business. I never heard of anyone being drowned by a leaky roof. It's a trick to get you up there. You be careful!"

"I don't think it's a trick." But even if he didn't, William frowned.

As for Williamina and Dave they stood and eyed Marietta with hungry relish. If Marietta had been a fat, round chocolate cream they could not have regarded her with a more devouring gaze.

"Is he really drowning?" Williamina demanded eagerly. "Why doesn't Nurse Butters put her hand under his chin?" For Williamina had learned to swim and knew what would keep a man from drowning. She had a vivid mental picture of Bobby Brown and Mr. Knox's old bed disappearing beneath a flood of water which poured through a hole in the roof.

"By crickey!" exclaimed Dave, his eyes sparkling. "I'll go with you, William." He looked around for the cap which he had tossed anywhere when he came in.

"I'll go, too." Williamina did not bother to look for a hat. She would go without. "I can be a help. I can swim."

"No, you won't go, Bill." William's voice was unpleasantly firm. "You'll stay here with Mr. Brewer. It wouldn't be polite to leave him by himself," he explained more gently.

Little did Williamina care for politeness when her mental gallery held such a thrilling picture as the drowning of Bobby Brown. She lifted her head and murmured rebelliously:

"I guess Louis is here." But there was something in William's eye as he looked at her and something in William's voice when he said: "Williamina!" that was not there very often, and she stopped suddenly. Instead of repeating that she would go she murmured with a meekness which was rare with Williamina: "Yes, William, it wouldn't be polite to leave Mr. Brewer with Louis and the sick malty." But she cast a venomous glance toward Mr. Brewer's voice, which kept repeating and repeating:

"You're a fool, William Kirwin. You're a fool."

William must have disagreed with him, or he did not care if he was a fool, for he pulled on an old raincoat and an equally antique hat and opened the door. The wind blew in a showery mist.

"I—I hope you'll be in time," Williamina choked back a lump in her throat to murmur as William and Dave and Marietta were engulfed in the dripping darkness. Williamina was doing her best to be polite.

"Fool business," muttered Mr. Brewer, coming out of somewhere and becoming something more than a voice. "Fool business." He glared at Williamina as if he thought she was to blame. "First thing William'll know he'll find himself married to one of those chits." For a man who looked upon women as greater pests than cockroaches or English sparrows, Mr. Brewer's mind seemed to dwell with inconsistent frequency on matrimony. "Well, I wash my hands of him," he went on bitterly. "He can't say I haven't warned him. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if they had a parson there this minute and one of them would marry him as soon as he put his foot inside the door."

"Oh!" Williamina's voice was an outraged wail. "I've got to be at William's wedding. I've just got to be!" And she would have dashed out

into the rain if Mr. Brewer had not caught her sleeve.

"Look here," he said, rather ashamed of himself when he saw how she trembled and how white her little face was. "William isn't going to be married now!"

"You said he was!" Williamina tried to twist herself free. Her lips quivered piteously and there was a big tear in each blue eye. "You said you wouldn't be surprised if he was married the minute he put his foot inside the door."

Mr. Brewer showed unusual self-control, for he swallowed a word or two before he muttered gruffly: "Well, I should be surprised. That was only—only a figure of speech, Bill," he finished briskly.

Williamina gave him a long, long look in which there was more contempt than politeness permitted, but Williamina had been sorely tried. Mr. Brewer was very much ashamed of himself when she said chokingly: "I don't like figure of speeches." She picked up the ailing kitten and went to a chair on the far side of the big room. Her fingers trembled as she smoothed the kitten's gray fur.

Mr. Brewer grew more and more ashamed of his outburst. "I say, Bill," he blurted out, following her across the room, "if William ever does

marry, you may come and be my little girl." He could not have made a more handsome apology. "How would you like to live in my house?" he went on pleasantly.

"You said just this instant minute that William was not going to be married," she said coldly, ignoring the apology, handsome as it was. "And I shouldn't like to live in your house at all." There was quite an edge to Williamina's voice as she stroked her kitten. It was not a bit like Mrs. Macartney's voice.

"You could bring all your cats and dogs, even your hens," went on Mr. Brewer generously. "Every one of the dar—I mean all of 'em," he corrected himself hastily, but Williamina only drew a sigh from the tips of her white canvas shoes.

"I don't see why people can't leave me alone," she said wearily, without raising her eyes from the maltese kitten. "Everybody wants to find another home for me and I'm—I'm about tired of it." Indignation lighted a flame that dried the tear in each blue eye. "I'm going to stay here with William as long as I live. I don't care how many times he gets married!" And then she looked up at Mr. Brewer defiantly.

Mr. Brewer only grunted. "Oh, well, if that's the way you feel," he said, and he threw himself

into William's big chair and was silent so long that Williamina grew nervous and uncomfortable.

She was afraid that she had not been as courteous as William's standard required. She searched her mind for a conversational topic which would bring peace and pleasantness.

"Where do you think William will run away in the morning?" There was not a trace of an edge to the voice with which she offered this question to Mr. Brewer.

He grunted again, but there was no temper in this grunt. "I'll eat my hat if William starts anywhere in the morning."

Williamina regarded his Panama and wondered if he could eat it. Animals ate straw, she knew, but did the Mr. Brewers? She hoped he would not try. She had a feeling that he would not like it.

"William told me we'd run away in the morning," she said firmly. "At sunrise, in the motor boat, so of course we shall, unless Mr. Brown is drowned dead. Then I suppose we'll stay for the funeral. You don't know Mr. Bob Brown, do you?" she asked when he failed to show any interest in Bob Brown's funeral.

"I do not." Evidently Bob Brown's acquaintance was not desired by Mr. Brewer. "I don't care a d——," he almost forgot again, but re-

membered just in time, "a hang about the young men of today, Bill. Selfish young idiots, all of 'em!"

"That's what you called your nephew," Williamina reminded him sternly. "I shouldn't think you'd be so proud of having a selfish young idiot in your family."

Mr. Brewer took the pipe from his mouth and looked at her. For some reason he was finding it difficult to talk to Williamina. She stroked the kitten's gray overcoat and wondered whether Mr. Brewer told the truth when he said William would be married or when he said William wouldn't be married. She wished she knew.

Marietta and William and Dave had long since made their way against the wind and through the rain to the cottage. William had to stop and laugh when Marietta threw open the door into Bobby Brown's room, although the rain really was pouring through the roof as fast as Marietta had said. But Helen stood beside the bed holding an umbrella over Bobby's head while a second umbrella was propped over Bobby's feet. Nurse Butters was holding a third umbrella over her own head as she moved pails from beneath one dripping hole to another in a vain attempt to gather up the water.

Bobby saw them first and shouted. "Hurrah!"

he cried. "Help is in sight. The relief expedition is here." He smiled joyously at Marietta's rain-wet face. It was the first time he had seen Marietta, and he found her face even more attractive than he had expected from her voice.

Helen gave a little cry, also, and her face cleared. If she had been alone on a desert island and William had been a white sail on the horizon she could not have looked more relieved.

Nurse Butters straightened her back. "The doctor said he wasn't to get excited," she said from under her umbrella. "I'm afraid he is excited." She paddled over the wet floor to the bed to feel Bobby's pulse and see if he was excited.

Bobby let her count the pulsations while he looked from Marietta to Helen and back again. He remembered very well Helen's white face and black hair and eyes. It was the last thing he had seen before he fainted that day, three weeks ago, but it was not so white now. Something had put a rose in each cheek, a red rose. He liked the red rose there immensely, and he liked Marietta's red-brown head. He had known he would like Marietta as soon as he heard her voice the morning after the accident. He couldn't tell which he admired the most, the black head or the red, as he let Nurse Butters count his pulse. Nurse Butters put down his wrist with a sigh.

"I don't know what the doctor will say," she murmured, for the pulse was beating faster than usual, but no one listened to her.

"You took your time," Helen was telling Marietta, her eyes on William's laughing face.

"It hasn't seemed long to me!" Bobby was grieved and showed it.

Marietta refused to answer Helen. She had her eyes on William, too. "Well," she said, "what shall we do? Take him upstairs?"

William had been measuring the width of the double door which led into the sitting-room and the width of the bed in which Bobby Brown was confined. "I'll move the bed," he said, and when the double door was opened wide he gave Bobby a ride out of the rainy zone into the dry comfort of old Mr. Knox's sitting-room with its walnut and haircloth furniture. Bobby whistled, Nurse Butters and Helen stared and Marietta blushed.

"Now, why didn't I think of that?" Marietta was disgusted because she hadn't thought of it.

"You couldn't expect me to think," Bobby said quickly. "I've been forbidden to think."

A dull red crept into Nurse Butters' cheeks, also, as she stood with a pail in each hand. "Well, for the land's sakes!" she said at last. "It's lucky for me I've got eighty-seven dollars and fifty cents coming in every month. I ain't fit to

came in with Bobby's tray balanced on her broad palm.

"I declare," Nurse Butters said cheerily, "I must have lost ten pounds the night of the storm. My clothes feel too big for me now."

"Oh!" The exclamation was one of disappointment, but joy came later, for if Nurse Butters was only within ten pounds of bursting, it would be quite safe for Williamina to go to Mifflin, and she let loose the words on her pink tongue. "I'll go with you!" she told Helen and Marietta joyfully. "I'm glad I put on my clean white piqué this morning."

Neither Marietta nor Helen had the heart to tell her that she could not go with them. In a very short time the breakfast dishes were washed, the cottage put in order, and Marietta and Helen in fresh white blouses and skirts, with Williamina between them and Grimshaw's best in the way of bathrobes and silk shirts packed in the back of Nurse Butters' runabout, drove out of the yard.

Williamina waved her hand to the yellow dog which stood at the gate looking wistfully after them.

"He hasn't turned into a prince yet, has he?" she said to Helen.

"He has not." Helen had not been able to detect any princely signs in the yellow dog, but

plaintive. "Didn't you hear me say I'm hungry? I'll repeat it, if you didn't. Listen—I am hungry! I want a beefsteak—rare—hashed brown potatoes and a romaine salad and a piece of apple pie with cheese and a cup of coffee. Strong black coffee—a big cup!" He smacked his lips as he told what he wanted. He couldn't help it. The order sounded so good to him.

Nurse Butters' mouth shot open, but words would not come, so she put her hand on her patient's head. "You don't think he is delirious?" she asked William, when she could speak.

"No," William laughed. "He's just hungry. Give him a cup of milk or beef tea." Bobby groaned. "I'd prescribe beef tea for all of you," William went on quite professionally, as if he had a medical diploma hanging on the wall above his desk instead of a print of Giotto's tower. "Give each of them a cup, Nurse Butters. It can't hurt them."

"You'll have a cup, too?" asked Helen eagerly. "Please do. There's plenty. Nurse Butters made a lot this morning. And tomorrow will you help me fix the roof? I haven't any idea where to find a carpenter nor a shingle."

"He can't come tomorrow. He won't be here," exclaimed Dave, who had been sadly disappointed at the way things had turned out. So

far as he could see, Bobby Brown had not been in danger of drowning for a minute.

"Won't be here!" Three pairs of eyes, black, brown and gray, stared at William, and there was something more than surprise in the black eyes. William groaned inwardly. He squirmed as he tried to avoid those black eyes full of surprise and something more, but he could not do it. How could he run away when Helen had asked him to help repair her leaking roof, when Mrs. Macartney expected him to prescribe for her hens and when old Danny Simms was coming the first thing in the morning to have the only right hand he had in the world dressed?

"Where will you be if you won't be here?" Marietta was almost as direct as Williamina in her means of obtaining information.

"I like your methods," Bobby told her with a grin. "You believe in going straight to the point, don't you? Now, Miss Spafford and I would waste time in leading up to that question. We might even miss it altogether. You don't take a chance, do you?"

"I do not." Marietta did not care if he did laugh at her. She had laughed at him scores of times and expected to laugh at him again. "What's the use of beating about the bush? Where are you going, William Kirwin?"

"Home," William told her. "If you can spare me, now. I'll find a carpenter for you in the morning, Miss Spafford. And, Dave, you cut home and tell your mother I'll look after the hens." He sighed as he promised.

"But you said we'd go in the morning, at sunrise," objected Dave.

"It will be too wet to start at sunrise," William said sadly. "We shall have to wait."

CHAPTER XII

AND so no one ran away. William might have said with Charles Lamb, that his friends were so intrusive that he was never Charles Lamb, but always Charles Lamb and company. But William, being William, could not very well run away when the only right hand Danny Simms had in the world needed dressing, when Mrs. Macartney had to have immediate help with her ailing hens, when Bobby Brown had just been saved from drowning and consequences which Nurse Butters shuddered to think of might develop, and when the roof of old Mr. Knox's cottage was so in need of a carpenter and a bundle of shingles.

William had been something of a fatalist ever since the doctor had told him he was unfit for military service, for service of any kind, so he shrugged his shoulders now and told himself: "What will be will be. If it's meant for me to keep Williamina I'll keep her, and if it isn't meant I could run from here to Kamschatka and lose her on the way."

He forbade Williamina to go to the cottage at all hours, as she had done, but there was a fascination that drew Williamina there like a bee to a rose. As often as she could she evaded William and ran up to follow Nurse Butters here, there and yonder with unflagging interest. Williamina had heard Mrs. Macartney tell Marietta that Nurse Butters was quite the fattest woman she had ever seen. "If she gains another pound I believe in my heart she will burst," Mrs. Macartney had said. And the very next day Nurse Butters had announced proudly that country air and country fare were agreeing with her. She could tell by the feel of her clothes. They were getting too snug for comfort. That could mean only one thing.

Williamina had fastened amazed and horrified eyes upon her, expecting then and there to see her burst, but, as yet, Nurse Butters remained safely and neatly buttoned in her white uniform. But some day she would burst out of it. Mrs. Macartney had said she would, and Williamina had never had occasion to doubt Mrs. Macartney's word. Consequently she knew that some day Nurse Butters would burst, and she wanted to be present. Williamina had never seen anyone, man, woman or dog, burst, and she shivered in anticipation of the treat. No wonder she disobeyed Wil-

liam and stole up to the cottage at all hours.

Bobby Brown had refused to return to solitary confinement after his escape from drowning, and he read his declaration of independence in a firm voice. It was rather disappointing to have the doctor look at him calmly and say coolly:

"That's all right. I was going to tell Nurse Butters that she could wheel you out on the porch this afternoon."

A suitcase full of smart garments had been in Bobby's car when he left Waloo, but sometime between his appearance at the cottage and the removal of the car from the road by Dr. Grey and William, it had disappeared, and he had been obliged to borrow from the wardrobe old Mr. Knox left behind when he moved to Heaven. But if he was to appear in society again he would need something besides old Mr. Knox's quaint night shirts, and he asked the doctor to bring him some clothes from Mifflin, a bathrobe, some silk shirts. His own trousers had been cleaned and pressed by Louis. Bobby elaborated on color and style until the doctor stopped him.

"I'll bring you what there is. But Mifflin is not New York." As if Bobby had ever thought it was. "It isn't even Waloo."

"I bet I'll look like the human limit in anything our pill box brings me." Bobby feared the worst

and his fears were more than realized when he opened the box the doctor put on the bed. The contents threatened him with a return of fever. The bathrobe was a mustard yellow with stripes of bright red, vermillion red.

"It makes me bilious just to look at it," groaned Bobby. "Take it away, nurse, at once. Bury it in the garden. Perhaps it will come up a yellow sunflower."

The shirts did not please him, either.

"I did my best." The doctor was unable to understand why Bobby was so disappointed. "I told old Grimshaw to put up the best he had, and here it is. What's the matter with them?"

"What's the matter?" began Bobby, glaring at Grimshaw's best, and then he stopped to look curiously at the doctor. "Don't you honestly know?" he begged, interested in spite of his disappointment in the doctor's taste.

Dr. Grey felt of the silk and of the bilious bathrobe. "The quality's good," he murmured. "They'll last forever. As for style," he hesitated, "I told you Mifflin wasn't New York."

"You did, and you've proved it," feelingly. "Well, you can take 'em back. I wouldn't wear them."

"You'll have to wear them or stay in bed," reminded the doctor truthfully.

That was a different pair of shoes, a very different pair of shoes, indeed, and Bobby groaned loudly. Marietta heard him and asked Nurse Butters if he were worse, if the exposure had hurt him. Bobby heard her and called for help. She laughed and laughed when she saw the mustard plaster bathrobe and the silk shirts which Bobby declared set his teeth on edge.

"You poor man!" She understood perfectly. "You'd rather stay in bed forever than wear these, wouldn't you?" She knew she should.

"I should. It's great, Miss White, to find some one who appreciates the effect of color on the system. I'd never be able to stand on my feet clad in this section of the rainbow."

"A doctor never thinks that medicine comes in anything but pills or bottles," Marietta remarked scornfully. "These would be poison for you, rank poison. Never mind. Helen and I are going to town tomorrow and we'll see what we can do. We won't leave it to any Grimshaw."

The chastened doctor took a fold of the bathrobe between his thumb and fingers, and he did not grit his teeth as Bobby had done when he touched it. "It's a good quality," he insisted. "I don't see—" He stopped at the curl of Marietta's lip. "Anyway I'm a very busy man," he added hastily and somewhat irrelevantly.

"I'm a busy woman," Marietta told him with a frown. "But I can find time to do an errand for a friend." As if the doctor had not shown that he could take time to do an errand for a friend.

Dr. Grey started to speak, but changed his mind, and when words came at last they were very meek, indeed, not at all the words he had meant to say.

"I'll drive you in."

"Thank you." Marietta was as demure as a kitten. "But Helen and I are going to borrow Nurse Butters' car. She has kindly offered it, and it will take us in—and out."

The doctor's face reddened to match the stripes in the bathrobe. "Of course I meant to bring you back," he said quickly.

Marietta smiled sweetly. "You didn't say so," she murmured reluctantly, as if she had thought he meant to leave her in Mifflin.

"You'll have to get up very early in the morning, doctor, if you want to get ahead of our little sauce box," Bobby told him consolingly.

The doctor did not answer him. He turned his back on both of them, on Bobby and Marietta, and gave his final directions to Nurse Butters in a very low voice, and then, with a very formal inclination of his head and never a word to them, he left the room.

"Now, see what you've done to my kind doctor," grumbled Bobby, but his eyes danced. "You'll have to eat a piece of humble pie, young woman, a big piece of humble pie."

"I never eat humble pie. I loathe it." But Marietta knew very well that she deserved a generous portion of that same humble pie. She was ashamed of herself as she met Bobby Brown's laughing eyes. She was so ashamed that she ran out of the room and out of the house to see Dr. Grey and Helen talking in the neglected garden. Helen's cheeks were pink and she was smiling. The doctor was smiling, too. Marietta sniffed. Dr. Grey's feelings had not been lacerated as deeply as she had thought. She shrugged her shoulders and walked away without even offering to eat any humble pie.

Williamina slipped into the cottage so early the next morning that Marietta and Helen were still at breakfast. Williamina smiled radiantly when she saw Nurse Butters in the kitchen preparing Bobby Brown's tray. So Nurse Butters hadn't done it during the night. Williamina was in time.

"Well, early bird," Marietta murmured languidly, for she felt as dull as tarnished silver that bright morning. "Did you meet any worm worth seeing on your way here?"

"Good morning, Williamina. Have a muffin?" Helen's voice was as bright as Marietta's had been dull. It fairly sparkled.

Williamina took a muffin. "William and I," she announced sadly, "got out of the wrong sides of our beds this morning, so we thought perhaps we hadn't better be together for a while. He's gone fishing, and I've come to spend the day with you." If she expected them to express enthusiastic joy she was disappointed, for neither Helen nor Marietta spoke. "William told me to go to Mrs. Macartney's," Williamina went on even more sadly. "He said I'd like it there, but there's no one young at the farm but the chickens. William doesn't know I like it here best," with an enchanting smile as she buttered her muffin.

Marietta looked at Helen and shook her head. "We feel highly honored, ducky," she said, "but we are going to town this morning."

"I'll go with you," was on the very tip of Williamina's pink tongue when she remembered Nurse Butters. Much as she would like to go to Mifflin with Marietta and Helen, she would rather remain at the cottage if there was any chance that Nurse Butters' performance would take place before she returned. She held the words on her tongue and looked eagerly at Nurse Butters, who

came in with Bobby's tray balanced on her broad palm.

"I declare," Nurse Butters said cheerily, "I must have lost ten pounds the night of the storm. My clothes feel too big for me now."

"Oh!" The exclamation was one of disappointment, but joy came later, for if Nurse Butters was only within ten pounds of bursting, it would be quite safe for Williamina to go to Mifflin, and she let loose the words on her pink tongue. "I'll go with you!" she told Helen and Marietta joyfully. "I'm glad I put on my clean white piqué this morning."

Neither Marietta nor Helen had the heart to tell her that she could not go with them. In a very short time the breakfast dishes were washed, the cottage put in order, and Marietta and Helen in fresh white blouses and skirts, with Williamina between them and Grimshaw's best in the way of bathrobes and silk shirts packed in the back of Nurse Butters' runabout, drove out of the yard.

Williamina waved her hand to the yellow dog which stood at the gate looking wistfully after them.

"He hasn't turned into a prince yet, has he?" she said to Helen.

"He has not." Helen had not been able to detect any princely signs in the yellow dog, but

her voice did not sound as disappointed as Williamina's voice.

"I don't understand it," frowned Williamina. "He's ugly enough, and you've been kind to him. Kindness always breaks the spell. I was sure he would turn into a beautiful prince when I gave him to you. Oh, I do love to ride in an automobile!" she burst forth. "It makes me understand what the magic carpet was like. It takes you along so fast your breath can't catch up with you, can it?" The last words were a gasp as the little car flew over the road. "I wonder if I would like flying as well. I'd be glad to try it." She glanced up at the spotless blue sky as if she hoped to see an aeroplane waiting for her. "I shouldn't be a bit afraid."

"Neither should I!" exclaimed Marietta. "I'd love it."

"I shouldn't." Helen shivered at the mere thought of flying. "I'll stay on good old Mother Earth, thank you!"

"Is she really afraid?" Williamina whispered to Marietta.

"She only thinks she is," Marietta whispered back. "It's all in the think, you know, honey."

Williamina nodded a wise young head. "I know. Nobody's really afraid, because there isn't anything really to be afraid of," she exclaimed

triumphantly. "William told me so." As if that made it a fact.

They argued the question as, one by one, the twelve miles which stretched from old Mr. Knox's cottage to the Mifflin post office were left behind them, and long before they had agreed they were in the Mifflin main street, and Williamina forgot to insist that William was always right, in her interest in the people and the shops. Mr. Grimshaw was most apologetic when his "best" was returned to him. He brought out other bathrobes and other silk shirts, and although none of them quite pleased Marietta's fastidious eyes she consented to take a bathrobe which was all dark blue.

"It may prove depressing," she said with a scornful glance at the despised red and yellow, "but it will never be nauseating."

As they left the store they met a friend of Mrs. Macartney's who invited them for luncheon. Williamina squeezed Helen's hand and stood on her tip toes for fear Marietta would refuse, but Marietta never thought of refusing. Marietta was wise enough to prefer a luncheon at Mrs. Wilson's to one at the Mifflin house.

"We'll be glad to eat a meal that we have not cooked," she said gratefully. "We'll be there at one o'clock, and we'll bring our best appetites with us."

"I hope your appetites won't be disappointed," laughed Mrs. Wilson, "for I fear it will be a very scrappy lunch. But I do want to hear about Mrs. Macartney."

One o'clock found them with their best appetites at the Wilson home, a big square, yellow house with white borders to the windows and doors and almost lost in the mass of shrubbery which grew around it and the vines that grew over it. Mrs. Wilson greeted them very cordially and introduced Williamina to her little daughter Mary.

"I am sure you will be good friends," she said before she turned to Helen and Marietta.

The two little girls were not so sure, as they eyed each other as children do. It was the country mouse who spoke first.

"Do you like to live in Mifflin?" she asked, and she sounded like her own grandmother.

Mary had never thought whether she did or didn't. She had accepted Mifflin without question. "Why, I've always lived here," she said in a puzzled voice. Where would she live if she didn't live in Mifflin?

"I've always lived in the country." Williamina said it proudly and joyously as if the country were far, far preferable to any town. "That is, ever since William found me in the bulrushes. I'd

rather live in the country than in any city that was ever built. It's healthier," she explained in her grandmotherly way to the open-mouthed Mary.

Mrs. Wilson heard her and laughed. "That sounds like Dr. Grey. He always insists that if people had more room they would have less disease."

"Do you know Dr. Grey?" asked Helen after waiting politely for Marietta to ask it.

"Do I know Stephen Grey? I can't imagine where the Wilson family would be if we didn't know him. He saved Albert from dying of typhoid, Mary from falling a victim to malignant diphtheria, and kept me alive when I had malaria two years ago. Indeed we do know Dr. Grey."

"Quite a life preserver, isn't he?" murmured Marietta naughtily.

"Oh, but let me tell you—" And Mrs. Wilson did tell them all through luncheon, which was not a bit scrappy but quite worthy of their best appetites. When a woman truly likes a doctor and feels that he has fought with her and for her to victory there is no subject she likes to sprinkle her adjectives over more, so, willy-nilly, Marietta and Helen had to hear what a wonderful doctor Stephen Grey was, even if he was but thirty-one years old, and what a splendid man Stephen Grey was.

"He was born and raised in Mifflin, so we feel we know all about him. His father was a doctor before him, and the dear old man was so happy when he realized his dream of having his son associated with him in his practice. He died two years after Stephen came back, and in a quaint, pathetic will left his patients to Stephen. Stephen has been more than a doctor to them. It's amazing to find so much sympathy and understanding in a man of his age. The only way I can explain it is that he is his father's son. The old doctor's death left him alone with the housekeeper, a queer old soul, who has looked after the family since Mrs. Grey died. Stephen's sisters are all married. He lives next door, you know."

Immediately Helen, Marietta and Williamina looked out of the window that looked next door. Helen and Marietta saw a big white house with green blinds standing on a square of green grass without any softening background of shrubbery or vines. Williamina saw nothing but the kitchen garden in the rear.

"Oh, Miss Helen!" She caught Helen's sleeve. "He has lettuce and asparagus and corn!"

"He has all of his shrubbery at the back of his house instead of at the front," Mrs. Wilson explained. "He thinks vines and things are damp and unhealthy."

"He'll help you grow lettuce, Miss Helen!" Williamina was whispering excitedly. "I know he will. He's a splendid giver."

"Indeed he is." Mrs. Wilson did not know what Williamina meant, but she knew Stephen Grey. "He would help anyone to make a garden. He is always sending his poor patients up for vegetables. He's a most unusual man. Mifflin is very lucky to have him."

"A country doctor!" Marietta couldn't or wouldn't understand Mrs. Wilson's admiration for Stephen Grey.

Mrs. Wilson turned to her quickly. "A country doctor, miss! But there are no greater heroes than the country doctors. I don't see how Stephen Grey lives. He no sooner comes home from one call than he has to go on another, over country roads in all kinds of weather. A city doctor can specialize; he can operate in a hospital where he has everything to work with, but a country doctor has to perform miracles with only his clever hands and brain. He has to fight ignorance and superstition as well as disease, and he hasn't any visiting nurse to help him. He often has to be nurse as well as doctor himself. You needn't sneer at country doctors, miss. As Williamina said, there are no men who give as they give, their time, their

strength, their skill, and they don't get very much for it, either."

"Oh, but Dr. Grey will!" broke in Williamina. She had not understood all that Mrs. Wilson said but she understood enough to forget how rude it is to interrupt grown-up conversation. "And you can't get unless you do give, at least you shouldn't. It isn't honest. Some day Dr. Grey will get a lot just as I shall, for I give, too, don't I, Miss Helen?"

Marietta had been rather stunned at what she had brought upon herself. "I wasn't sneering," she hastened to say.

"You had better not when I'm around," Mrs. Wilson told her emphatically. "There isn't a man living who gives as generously of himself and his skill as Stephen Grey gives."

Williamina pulled Helen's sleeve again. "That's what I said," she whispered. "He'd be glad to help you grow your lettuce."

But Helen did not seem to care to discuss lettuce. She only patted Williamina's fingers as she asked her own question:

"And Dr. Grey lives there alone?" She felt sorry for him if he did. She knew what it was to live alone.

And gladly Mrs. Wilson gave them another chapter on Stephen Grey, taking as her theme his

bachelor state, which she deplored. "He needs a wife to take care of him more than any man I know," she said.

"I pity the wife," murmured Marietta to no one in particular.

Mrs. Wilson and Helen turned to her quickly, but it was Mrs. Wilson who asked indignantly why Dr. Grey's wife, when he had one, should be pitied.

"You said yourself that he was so busy he dropped asleep in his chair, that he was out on calls all the time, that he should have some one see that he has proper food and rest," exclaimed Marietta with a twinkle in her brown eyes. "That doesn't sound like a very entertaining job to me. Of course some girl who is interested in charitable or philanthropic work——"

"Marietta!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilson indignantly.

"Why, Marietta!" Helen was just as indignant, although Dr. Grey had never been a life preserver for any of her people.

Marietta held her ground and the ensuing discussion was interesting neither to Williamina nor to Mary. They eagerly accepted Mrs. Wilson's suggestion that they should go out and play while the others lingered over their coffee.

In the garden Williamina and Mary were

joined by one of Mary's friends, a black-haired, black-eyed child in the most beautiful frock Williamina had ever seen. She turned quite green with envy when she saw it, but she carefully hid the color from Elsie and Mary. She only let them see how much cleverer she was in planning games than they were.

"Don't let's play with her," Elsie whispered to Mary when she discovered Williamina's cleverness. "She doesn't know who she is, and she lives in a shack up the river. She said so."

Mary blushed painfully and knew not which to follow, the courtesy her mother tried to teach her or the whisper from her friend.

"She hasn't any father nor any mother," went on Elsie pitilessly.

At that Williamina jumped to her feet and looked down at them with flashing eyes.

"No, I haven't any father nor any mother!" she exclaimed. "And I'm glad of it! But I had a father and a mother, too, both of them. William said so. And who do you think my father was?" But before they could tell her she turned to Mary. "Have you a father?" she asked sharply. And when Mary had nodded a bewildered little head, she asked impatiently: "What kind of a father is he?"

"He's a lawyer father," stammered Mary, the

inside of her brown head even more bewildered than the outside.

"Huh!" Williamina couldn't have cared much for lawyer fathers. She pointed her finger at Elsie. "Have you a father, too?"

"Of course I have," began Elsie indignantly, but Williamina did not allow her to finish.

"No of course, at all!" she cried. "Lots of people haven't fathers. William hasn't, and I haven't, and your own mother," to Mary, "told us this very day that Dr. Grey hasn't any father, either. What kind of a father is yours?" There was that in her voice which should have told Elsie no matter what kind of a father she had Williamina would not approve of him.

"My father," peacocked Elsie, "has a store, the very biggest store in this town."

"Huh!" exclaimed Williamina. "And what do you think my father might have been?" she demanded with a proud emphasis on the pronoun which seemed to raise her far, far above them. "He might be a president, only presidents haven't any little girls. And he might be a king on a throne, and my mother might be a queen in a red velvet tail and ermine and with a crown on her head." She could see the queenly mother as she described her, and her voice was so confident and eager that Elsie and Mary could see her, too.

" 'Most any day now a herald may come through the country asking for the Princess Rosalind, who was stolen from her cradle, and if I want to I can step forward and say, 'Here am I.' And they'd put velvet and ermine on me," with a scornful glance at Elsie's pretty frock until Elsie longed to run away and hide it, "and a crown on my head, and I could ride away in a glass coach—no, a flying machine, I think, if I wanted to, but I don't. I'd rather stay with William."

Elsie looked over her shoulder as if she expected to hear the herald's trumpet or the purr of the flying machine. She never doubted that Williamina could wear a crown if she wanted to. Williamina's manner was so assured that she felt Williamina could do anything. Williamina made Elsie dissatisfied with her own commonplace existence, with her merchant father; she was sorry she had not been found like Williamina in a rowboat, to live in a river shack and some day be hailed as the Princess Rosalind.

Williamina commanded like a princess. Her head was high, as if she really wore a crown, and she flirted her piqué skirt as if it was of velvet. Elsie and Mary had to see the world as she saw it, for that was the way of Williamina, and they meekly followed her lead. It was very exciting but very tiring, and when Mary crept closer to

her mother and Williamina saw Mrs. Wilson slip an arm around her and draw her closer, Williamina's heart skipped a beat. But only one beat. In a flash she tossed her head high again. What did she want of a mother to cuddle her close when she had William and her own imagination? William had told her that they would be all she would ever need, and she believed William.

But even if she did she was very quiet as they drove away, leaving Elsie and Mary staring after them open-mouthed, for so potent was the spell Williamina had cast over them that they saw her wafted away in a royal coach instead of in Nurse Butters' shabby little runabout, which was second-hand if you didn't count the first owner.

When they reached the cottage Williamina never stopped to see if Nurse Butters was still safely buttoned in her white uniform nor to see how Bobby Brown liked Marietta's choice of bath-robes and silk shirts. She wanted to run to William as fast as her two feet would carry her and feel his arms around her. She knew that William's arms would be as tender and as loving as the arms of any mother.

And in spite of the fact that they had both stepped out of their beds on the wrong side that morning William must have felt the same way,

for she saw him coming toward her through the pine trees.

"Where have you been, Bill?" he called anxiously as soon as he saw her. "Mrs. Macartney said she hadn't seen you all day."

Williamina never told him that she had disobeyed him and gone to the cottage. She threw herself into his arms and pressed her hot little face against him. "Oh, William, darling," she said sobbingly, "I'd rather have you than all the mothers in the whole world. I would! Why, any little girl can have a mother; Elsie has one and Mary, but there isn't another girl in the big wide world who has a William of her very own." She hugged him fiercely and was quite silent while he hugged her. Then she caught her finger in his tie and coughed twice before she let the words come in a rush: "William, dear, I've been a horrid beggar maid ever since I got out of bed on the wrong side this morning. My father never could have been a king!"

CHAPTER XIII

IF the William Kirwin Rescue League had ever been formally organized you might well have thought that a meeting was being held on the porch of old Mr. Knox's house that evening, for all of the charter members were present but Mrs. Macartney, who was making out bills for eggs and chickens at Wayside Farm and wishing that she had never been born.

Nurse Butters had wheeled her patient out, using one of the old sofas as an invalid chair. Bobby Brown wore his new bathrobe, which made him feel more like a respectable man than a tomato scrambled with a couple of eggs, as he said the doctor's choice of the best in bathrobes made him feel. Helen sat beside him, where Bobby could see the white curve of her cheek and the sheen of her black hair. And on the steps was Marietta, with her red-brown head and brown eyes, her restless fingers busy with the stocking she was knitting for the soldiers. Marietta was rapidly ceasing to be a candle burned at both ends,

and in her pretty voile frock was well worth looking at.

Bobby glanced from one girl to the other. What a gorgeous pink scented clover patch old lady Fate had pitched him into! He wanted to make votive offerings or pay tribute to her shrine. And if his eyes lingered longer on one pretty clover than on the other it is not surprising. All men have their preference, a blonde or a brunette, and Bobby had known all of his life which he preferred. He was so content, so delighted to find that he remained faithful to his preference that he scarcely heard the report which Nurse Butters was presenting in her deep voice.

"I had a letter from my friend in Bayview," she boomed, "and she says the Mills never had any children at all. It's too bad. Mrs. Mills would have been a fine mother for any little girl. And Mr. Mills is a fine man. Williamina would have liked them both."

Helen sighed, and Bobby thought how sympathetic she was. He considered sympathy a most important characteristic for the only girl.

"It does seem too sad—" Helen's voice sounded very soft and gentle after Nurse Butters' deep, deep tones—"for a little girl like Williamina not to have a real home and real parents. I wish you could have heard her this afternoon." And she

told them of Williamina's speech to Elsie and Mary, which she had overheard. "She actually made them believe that she was a king's daughter. It would have been funny to see how awed and impressed they were if it hadn't been so pathetic."

"There!" Nurse Butters leaned forward, her round face bright with interest. "You've reminded me that there was something queer about a family of Kings in Riverview. I've a friend there, and I'll write to her tomorrow. The Kings lost one or two children in a fire or a flood or some way," vaguely.

Bobby laughed. He could not help it. Nurse Butters looked at him rebukingly.

"It isn't any laughing matter to lose a child, as you'd know if you'd ever been a father," she said sternly.

"I wasn't laughing at the Kings for losing their children," Bobby hastened to explain. "I was laughing at you."

"At me?" Nurse Butters couldn't imagine what there was laughable about her.

"At you," repeated Bobby. "You seem to think that any woman might be Williamina's mother. By Jove—!" He stopped suddenly and knit his brows into a frown.

"Yes?" Marietta looked up from her knitting.

Nurse Butters shook her head. "That isn't

what I said, Mr. Brown, not at all what I said," she murmured.

"I saw something in the *Waloo Gazette.*" Bobby started to rise from his haircloth sofa to find the *Waloo Gazette,* but dropped back with a grimace. "Darn these legs of mine!" he said impatiently.

Nurse Butters rose and readjusted his pillows. "Maybe you don't like your legs," she said, as Marietta ran to find the *Waloo Gazette.* "But you'll have to admit that they are better than wooden ones. You can mislay wooden legs. I once knew a man who had two wooden legs, and when his wife wanted to know where he was, she'd hide them both. It made him as helpless as a baby."

"And the moral of that is, don't get a wife," grumbled Bobby crossly. "Thank you for your little sermon, Nurse Butters. You should be in the ministry. Now, then." He took the paper Marietta handed him and turned the pages. "Here it is—'Amos Langley and wife entertain the newsboys in memory of their child, who was taken from them nine years ago,'" he read. "That's just about right, isn't it? Williamina said she was ten, and that she was about a year old when Kirwin picked her out of the bulrushes."

"You're as bad as Nurse Butters." Marietta

was leaning over the back of the couch to read with him. He could feel her breath on his hair, he could feel it in every vein. "The Langleys' child was a boy."

"How do you know?" Bobby turned his head, which brought his face very close to Marietta's. He quite forgot his question as he looked into her topaz eyes. By George, how clear they were! It seemed as if he could look down, down— His heart thumped loudly. He was sure she could hear it.

But if Marietta heard his thumping heart she gave no sign, she did not even blush. "If it had been a girl the Langleys would have entertained cash girls. They wouldn't have bothered with newsboys," she told him firmly as she moved away.

Bobby threw down the paper. "You are the best little cold-water thrower, Miss Sherlock Holmes," he said impatiently. "What do you think, Miss Spafford?" His voice changed completely when he spoke to Helen. It was softer, more gentle. He hoped Marietta would notice the difference.

Helen sighed again. "I don't know. All I do know is that we don't seem to be getting anywhere in our search for Williamina's people."

"That's true enough," Bobby agreed. "Sup-

pose we drop it? She seems to be happy as she is, and old Kirwin is happy, too, so why not leave them alone?"

"William shouldn't be happy," Marietta told him, while Helen frowned. "He hasn't any business to be happy and contented in this out-of-the-way hole."

"Contentment," remarked Bobby, sounding as wise as Solomon, "is a great thing."

"Contentment," sneered Marietta, "is stagnation, death. I hope I'll never be contented!"

"Why, Marietta White!" Nurse Butters was scandalized. "I don't see how you dare say the things you do. I knew a girl once who said it couldn't ever be too hot for her, and the very next thing she married a man who took her right down to the equator to live. The very hottest place in the world! I guess when she was sweltering there she found it could be too hot even for her. It isn't safe to say such things."

"If your friend hadn't been so reckless with her words I suppose the man she married would have taken her to the North Pole," murmured Marietta.

"I suppose he would." Nurse Butters stood by her guns. "Maybe you don't want to be contented, but I'd rather be contented than uncomfortable."

"I believe you!" Marietta's voice was so fervent that they all laughed, even Nurse Butters, although she hadn't the faintest idea why. She did not realize that she showed in every inch of her large round body that she believed in comfort first.

"Why this hilarity?" And William came around the house. "Here is that book you asked for, Bob." He tossed the volume to the invalid. "What's the joke?" he asked again as he pulled a chair up beside Helen, who looked at him with a pink smile of welcome. "What have you been talking about?" He gave her the kindly smile which always sent a thrill from her head to her heels.

It thrilled her then, as they sat there in the twilight, and gave her courage to tell him the truth. "We were talking of you!"

"Of me?" He couldn't imagine why they should talk of him. "What did you find to laugh at about me?" He was not a bit offended, although Helen hastened to tell him that they had been laughing at Nurse Butters and talking of him.

"We don't understand how you can be satisfied and contented here," she went on, her nervous fingers turning her handkerchief into fine pleating. "It's such a stupid, humdrum life.

And you're not a stupid man." She turned scarlet.

William did not look to see how pretty she was with the scarlet wave in her white cheeks. He stared across the grass to the Mississippi, which was like a silver ribbon. "I was scrapped," he said at last in a low voice. "I hadn't any choice, you know. I was thrown out."

"But that was years ago!" Helen cried quickly. "Dr. Grey said you were perfectly all right now."

"I don't see how you do stand it," Marietta brought up reinforcements. "It is all very well for a couple of months in the summer, but the winters! I should think you would die." She shivered at the mere thought of what William's winters must be.

"I have Williamina," William told them simply.

Something seemed to clutch the inside of Helen's throat, and Bobby thought he heard a moan from the chair in which she sat, but it might have been only the squeak of a loosened board under a rocking-chair, for Helen took her courage in her two hands and said boldly: "But have you the right to keep Williamina?—I mean to keep her from her own people?" She stopped suddenly, silenced by William's face as he turned it to her.

William did not lose his temper easily. Years

and circumstances had taught him self-control. He tried to speak courteously, tried not to let these young people see that he considered Williamina none of their business. "But who are her own people?" he asked. "And where are they? I tried to find them nine years ago, and I couldn't. I did everything a man could do."

"But that was years ago, just as you said," ventured Helen, knowing well that she was skating on very thin ice. "Perhaps now——"

He did not let her finish. "Why should I try now?" he interrupted sharply. "Shouldn't the parents make some effort? Why do you put it up to me?" He didn't see why they should bother about it at all, and he couldn't keep the fact from his voice.

"By George, you're about right!" Bobby broke in. "If her people want her, it's up to them to find her."

"They don't know where she is!" cried Helen.

"And I don't know where they are," William answered grimly.

There wasn't much of an answer they could make to that, so they were silent, while the afterglow faded from the western sky and left it dull and colorless. That would be his life, William thought, if Williamina's parents ever should find her.

"Even if you can't find Williamina's people, Mr. Kirwin, you shouldn't keep her here," Helen exclaimed suddenly.

William was surprised at her words. "Why not?" he asked indignantly. "I should like to know of a better place for a child."

"You can't give her any advantages here," stammered Helen. She hated to hurt him, but she was determined to say what she thought. She might never have another chance.

"Advantages!" William's voice seethed with scorn. "She has every advantage a child should have. She knows more than lots of girls twice her age. She can swim like a fish and run like a deer; she doesn't know how to lie; she can make a decent cup of coffee and darn a stocking as well as a grown woman. What more should a child of ten know?" he demanded triumphantly. He was positive they could not tell him of anything.

But they could. There were heaps of things, but Helen mentioned only one.

"But what does she know of people? She has lived in this lonely little corner all of her life, but she won't be satisfied to stay here forever. No girl would. She will want to go out into the world some day and she won't be ready. She won't know how to get along with people."

There was a general protest. Even the mem-

bers of the William Kirwin Rescue League had to see the injustice of that statement. William Kirwin himself grunted scornfully.

"You're dead wrong there, Miss Spafford." Bobby hated to disagree with a pretty girl, but truth was truth. "Williamina's a born mixer. She doesn't need to learn how to get along with people."

William made him a present of a very grateful glance, and before Helen could fire another bomb at him, he asked quickly, looking her squarely in the face: "What does it matter to you what becomes of Williamina and of me? You think because you are a woman that you can bring up a girl better than I can, but I reckon a man knows what makes a good woman as well, if not better, than any woman. It is very kind of you to be interested in us," he lied. He didn't think that it was kind at all. "But I can't see why you should be." He was perfectly sincere, he couldn't see. He ran his fingers through his hair in an effort to see.

Helen shrank back. She felt as if she had been slapped, and, what was worse, she knew that she deserved to be slapped. Marietta did not feel that way at all.

"I'll tell you why we are interested, William Kirwin." How Helen blessed her for the pro-

noun. "It's because you are too big and fine a man to throw yourself away as you have done. You owe something to the world, everybody who is born into it does, and you won't pay your debt. You haven't any excuse now. You just prefer to loaf here when men like you are needed out there," she waved her arms to show him where he was needed, "as they were never needed before. I've said," she went on boldly, "that you were a coward, afraid to face the world, and a cheat, because you don't pay your debt to it, behind your back, and I'm not afraid to say it to your face!"

That was plain speaking, very plain speaking, indeed, and William did not like it any better than you or I would. He drew a quick breath. It is not pleasant for a man to hear himself called a coward and a cheat, even if he has been told first that he is big and fine. From the bottom of his heart he wished that he had not brought Bobby a book, that he had gone up the river bank with Williamina. He didn't care what Helen thought, or Marietta. They couldn't think any worse of him than he did of them. He hadn't any use for the modern girl, interfering busybody. He hoped to Heaven Williamina would never grow into one. He wouldn't give her the opportunity by taking her out in the world. He'd keep her here to be-

come a real woman, not a tangle of half-baked theories.

Helen had caught her breath, too, at Marietta's bold speaking, and she did not dare to continue it. She did dare to return to Williamina.

"I hate to hear Williamina talk of mothers," she murmured, apropos of nothing. "It's dreadful."

"It isn't!" contradicted William, glad that the talk was shifted from himself, even if it was back to Williamina. "It's natural. What does Williamina know of mothers? There aren't many around here. She has never missed her own mother. Little children don't so long as they are fed and clothed and loved. Don't think I mean to belittle mothers. I couldn't do that. I think mothers are God's best gift to the world. The sweetest memory I have is of my own mother." If Maeterlinck is right, William's own mother, in the far away Land of Memory, must have stirred then and opened her sweet blue eyes and smiled happily when her son spoke of her as his sweetest memory. "But Williamina can't remember her own mother. Mrs. Macartney has been mighty good to her, but Williamina hasn't needed even Mrs. Macartney's mothering. I hate to talk about it, but while we are on the subject I'll tell you what I really think." They were all ears as they

waited for William to tell them. "You know that several little towns were destroyed, actually wiped out of existence, by that cyclone nine years ago. And I believe that the Providence that placed Williamina in the boat and sent it adrift down the river took her parents. They must be dead or they would have found her long ago. That's my theory, and I know it's right unless—" he paused, and they hung on his words, "Williamina is right and she is a fairy child, who was sent to keep me from being a lonely, selfish old brute." There was a twinkle in William's eyes as he gave them his second story. "No one but a fairy could have put up with me."

The silence which followed was broken by the fairy child herself, who came dashing up from the river.

"William! Oh, William!" she shrieked.

William jumped to his feet. Helen frowned jealously. Williamina was always in the way.

"Oh, William!" Williamina's feet were carrying her to him as fast as they could, and she gasped triumphantly: "I'm just like you and Pharaoh's daughter! I've found a boy in the bulrushes!"

CHAPTER XIV

"A BOY in the bulrushes!" William's voice was a gasp, too. "Whatever do you mean, Bill?"

Williamina stopped and gulped before she could tell him what she meant. "I was walking up the bank, you know, William, to Danny Simms' minnow box to meet him, and all at once I saw a boat in the bulrushes. It wasn't any boat I knew, and I leaned over to look at it. And there was a man in it! There was!" she repeated as if they doubted her. "I didn't know whether he was dead," her voice sank to a horrified whisper, "or asleep. I almost fell into the river, and I screamed the way I do sometimes." She looked at William, and he nodded. He knew the way she could scream when she was angry or startled. "And then the man opened his eyes so I knew he wasn't quite dead. He sat up and looked around as if he didn't know where he was, and then he said quite loud—William, dear, I just had to hear —'Damn!' And then he said in a very, very cross voice, 'Where the devil am I?' And I told him

he wasn't far from our shack, and then he rubbed his eyes and said he was a fool to fall asleep when he was fishing and let his boat be carried away by the river. He wasn't a bit pleased, for he kept looking around and saying: 'Well, I'll be damned!' as if he just couldn't believe he had been a fool. He had lost his oars, so he couldn't row back, and he asked me if we had a pair to loan him. He asked for a pair of strong arms, too, and I said the only arms I could loan him were my own but he was welcome to them, and I'd do the best I could. And then he laughed and wished my muscles were as strong as my kindness. And then he wanted to come ashore and he slipped and fell into the river. He said some awful words, William. I wouldn't tell you what they were, but I could for I didn't put my fingers in my ears. I listened. And when he crawled up on the bank he was wet to the skin. He said if he didn't get dry clothes at once he'd have pneumonia or pleurisy and die right there. So I took him up to the shack and showed him where your clothes were and told him to help himself. And then I ran up to tell you about it. He's putting on the dry clothes now. You'd better come and see him," she finished breathlessly.

"You certainly had," laughed Bobby. "And

say goodby to your spoons. Who was he, Williamina? Some tramp?"

"I don't think he was a tramp exactly," frowned Williamina. "He said his name was Mr. Hunter Olney."

"Hunter Olney!" cried William, and the strangest expression slipped over his face. "Are you sure, Williamina?"

"That's what he said." Williamina looked at him in surprise. William seldom called her by her full name and she did not understand why he should do so now. She hastened to tell him all that she knew. "He said his name was Hunter Olney and he seemed to think I should know who he was. He lives in Waloo. He told me so as we walked from the river, and he was dripping river water at every step. His shoes were all squashy."

"Hunter Olney!" whistled Bobby. "It can't be the breakfast food king!"

Williamina shook her head so decidedly that her hair bows bobbed wildly. "Oh, no, he isn't any king. He didn't have any crown nor any scepter nor any ermine with him." She offered the lack of regalia as a positive proof and with much regret. It would have been so interesting if the man who had dripped river water at every step had been a king.

"The breakfast food king wouldn't wear a crown on his head," chuckled Bobby, "but I should expect him to carry a package of Olney's Hearts of Wheat in his hand. He's a hard nut if everything you hear is true. Regular Midas. Everything he touches turns to gold."

"I know about King Midas. William told me." Williamina seldom missed a chance to show her knowledge. "Even his little daughter turned to gold, didn't she? I shouldn't have liked that at all. And there are better things than gold in the world, aren't there, William?"

William had stood like a wooden statue ever since he had heard the name of Hunter Olney, and there was the strangest expression in his eyes. Usually William's face was like a nice soft piece of brown leather but just then it seemed made of clay, it was so gray and pasty. He put aside his own thoughts when Williamina spoke to him impatiently.

"Yes, yes. What did you say, Bill? Come, we must go and see this—this Hunter Olney." The hand he held out shook.

"I should strongly advise you to hasten if you care anything for your possessions," murmured Bobby.

"Had we better borrow Nurse Butters?" suggested Williamina. "Mr. Brown will lend her,

won't you, Mr. Brown? And Mr. Olney said if he didn't have anything worse he'd have a chill but he expected at least pleurisy or double pneumonia. Do you know what to do for them, William?" she asked anxiously. "We can just as well borrow Nurse Butters for a while."

"Shall I step down with you, Mr. Kirwin?" Nurse Butters showed a pleasant willingness to be borrowed.

"I doubt if it is necessary, thank you." William laughed, an odd little laugh, not a bit like his usual jovial chuckle. "I'll let you know if pneumonia or pleurisy develop. Come, Bill. Good night." And holding Williamina's hand tight in his he hurried her away.

"Well, wouldn't that get you," murmured Bobby, looking after them. "Do you suppose it is the old breakfast food king, Hunter Olney, himself?"

"How old a king is he?" asked Marietta with idle curiosity.

"About Kirwin's age, I should say. Oh, he's a wonder all right. Makes more money than he knows what to do with. Hard as nails and efficient as the dickens. He's a bachelor, so I see where my nose is out of joint," and he looked from one spinster to the other. "Run along with

a mustard plaster, Nurse Butters. I wouldn't stand in your way."

"There ain't a mite of mustard in the house," yawned Nurse Butters. "And it ain't professional to rush in until you're asked. I understand what you mean, Mr. Brown, and maybe it isn't always pleasant to be a single lady, but marrying to me is just as if you was led up to one of those closed circus wagons on Wobbler's billboard and shut in with a critter you don't know anything about. It's all gold and glitter on the outside but the inside—the inside," she repeated darkly.

"Nurse Butters," cautioned Bobby, "you must not talk that way before these girls, for you know very well that marriage is the destined end"—An indignant chorus interrupted him.

"Oh, you back number!" it rose scornfully. "Was, not is! We'll grant you 'was' but never 'is.'"

"Maybe it's all right for those who like risks," Nurse Butters rose heavily to her feet, "but buttermilk's a tonic for some and rank poison to others. The unfortunate part is you can't tell till you've drunk a glass. Now, Mr. Brown, the dew's falling. You better come in."

He went reluctantly, and Marietta and Helen were left alone on the steps in the fragrant twilight.

"I don't think," Marietta said thoughtfully, "that we accomplished very much by our presentation of a certain case to William."

"He's perfectly wild about that child," Helen exclaimed indignantly. "He can't see that there is anyone else in the world." Her voice shook as she told Marietta how limited William's sight was.

"Then other people shouldn't concentrate their gaze on him," advised Marietta speaking lightly, but there was a world of meaning in her words if Helen wanted to listen to it. "Do you suppose Williamina did pick a breakfast food king out of the river?" she asked with a giggle.

"How should I know?" Helen shrugged her shoulders. "And what do I care?" she added impatiently.

"Royalty is always interesting," yawned Marietta, but Helen refused to find any interest in a breakfast food king, and so Marietta left her to her thoughts, which were not pleasant, for Helen frowned and frowned as she sat there in the fragrant darkness.

William rushed Williamina along so that her feet scarcely touched the ground until they were in sight of the shack and then his steps slackened. There was a light in the big living room and

through the window they could see a man's shadow. Williamina pointed it out to William with joyful fingers.

"I knew he wouldn't run away with the spoons," she cried. "Nor with your clothes. Kings don't steal. They don't have to," she explained as though a lack of need was the only reason that royalty was honest. "Come in quick, William, and tell him how sorry you are that he fell into the river."

But William could not go in quick. His step lagged as he went up to the porch and Williamina's lagged too, for a thought had flashed fear to her active brain and she clung to William's hand.

"If he's a king maybe he's my father, William, dear," she said in a frightened voice. "You don't think he has come for me?" The tears dimmed her eyes. "I don't think I'm a princess at all. I never really did! I'm almost sure I'm a beggar maid," she whispered.

William stopped at the door and looked down at her. The hard strained look left his eyes. "Don't bother your head about that, Bill. You're not Hunter Olney's daughter."

Williamina stopped shivering and laughed. "Then let's go in," she cried, pulling him to the door.

Hunter Olney was standing with his back to them, looking at one of William's old portraits. He swung around when the door opened. "Hel" —he began and stopped to stare and stare. "Why—why," he began again. "Bill—Bill Kirwin! It isn't old Bill Kirwin?" He crossed the room in three great strides to put his hand on William's shoulders to make sure that William was not a ghost.

Williamina clapped her hands. "It is! It is! It is William Kirwin. How did you know? Did I tell you?"

But Hunter Olney did not hear her. He was too intent on William's gray face. "Old Bill Kirwin," he repeated as if he couldn't believe that William was old Bill Kirwin. "Where have you been? I thought you were dead. You disappeared, you know. I supposed you were with the regiment when you didn't join me in Waloo, and when I caught up with it in San Francisco and you weren't there—well, it broke me all up. I wrote and wired right and left but I couldn't hear a word. Nobody seemed to know what had become of you. And when I came back from the Philippines I did my best to find you. Where were you, Bill? And why did you drop out like a thief?"

William straightened his shoulders. The hurt

look left his face and his hand found Hunter Olney's hand and gripped it hard.

"I was worse than a thief," he said slowly. "The doctor sentenced me, Hunt; gave me just a year, and ordered me into solitary confinement. He wouldn't have me in the army. I was like an animal, I guess; I wanted to get away and die by myself. It wasn't your fault your letters didn't reach me, but I blamed you because they didn't. I kept thinking you hadn't tried to find me. I was an inconsistent fool. I felt as if you had thrown me off, too, and it was I who ran away from you. But you don't know what I went through—it was hell!" he shuddered.

Hunter's big hand patted the shaking shoulders. "That's all right, old chap. It's over now. I've found you, and I shan't lose you again. And you've lived here all these years alone?" He looked about as if he could not believe nor understand that William had lived there for eighteen years.

William nodded. "Alone, until I found Williamina."

"Like Moses in the bulrushes," broke in Williamina eager to take part in this fascinating conversation. "Just like I found you."

Hunter tore his eyes from William long enough to smile at her. "Thank God you did find me.

I might never have run across you, Bill, if she hadn't. To think of it, you here while I was in Waloo, not a hundred miles away. You must have known I was there. Why, Olney's Hearts of Wheat are advertised everywhere."

"I didn't know they were made by old Hunt Olney, and anyway I was sore. I didn't know you had tried to find me. I thought you had heard and——"

"You never thought that!" Hunter interrupted indignantly. "You couldn't have thought that!"

"Well, I did think it. You don't know what a blind stubborn imbecile I was for nine years. I deliberately cut myself out of the world and then hated the world for forgetting me. I couldn't see anything but myself and my broken ambitions. You'd have been the same if you had been me."

"Maybe." But Hunter knew he wouldn't have been the same. He didn't argue the question. He preferred to clap William on the shoulder and repeat "Bill Kirwin! Old Bill Kirwin!" until it sounded like an anthem. He could not believe that he had found his old college chum.

A chance word from William reminded him that he was a king in the financial world and he asked anxiously for a telephone. "I'll just call

up Rogers and tell him I'm here or there will be the dickens to pay."

"We haven't any telephone, but Mrs. Macartney has," Williamina told him.

"Where is this Mrs. Macartney? Come with me, Bill." And without waiting for an answer he turned to the door. He stumbled over something on the floor and stooped to pick up a toy. "Hello, what's this? I say," he grinned broadly as he looked at it. "Who made this?" It was the breakfast food king, not the old college chum, who spoke.

William and Williamina laughed. "Old Bill Sniglefritz," they answered together. You might have thought they had rehearsed the words.

Hunter put the toy carefully on the table. "You must tell me about that later, after we have found Mrs. Macartney's telephone," he said.

Mrs. Macartney was still making out bills and wishing more than ever that she had never been born. Hunter looked at her as he waited for his long distance call to be put through, and she talked to William. The women he knew all acted as if they could and would run the world. It was a novelty to find one who didn't even want to manage a chicken farm. Mrs. Macartney's hair was ruffled and the bills had flushed her cheeks so that in the subdued light of her desk

lamp, she looked young and pretty. She looked more like a woman, as Hunter thought women should look. He had no use for the confident superwoman of the day.

"Damn interfering fools," he thought when they came in committees to investigate the conditions in his factory or to ask for a contribution to something of which he did not approve.

"You've asked me for money for every sort of scheme to take women out of the home," he said to a delegation one day. "I'll give double the amount if you'll agitate a plan to send them back in."

"Oh, Mr. Olney!" the committee had exclaimed as one woman, "Women can't stay in the home now!"

"Why can't they?" he wanted to know.

"There isn't anything for them to do there."

He looked at them in disgust. Nothing for a woman to do in a home. Why his mother—"You women depend a lot upon your woman's instinct, don't you?" They told him they did, it was their compass. He snorted. "Well, the good Lord gave men something even more valuable and that's judgment. And it's my judgment, ladies, that you are throwing away pearls in your efforts to gather worthless shells."

He remembered this as he stood first on one

foot and then on the other, the receiver at his ear, and he was so interested in his discovery of a woman true to the old type, that he was very short in his explanation to the worried host of the house party he had left so strangely. He told Mr. Rogers that he did not care to be sent for, that he would return when he was ready.

William carried him off long before he wished to go. He would like to have stayed and helped Mrs. Macartney with her bills. Bills were nothing to him. A woman shouldn't be bothered with such matters anyway, and he questioned William why this particular woman should be so annoyed when it was as plain as the nose on his face that she didn't want to make out bills.

"A most unusual woman, one in a thousand," he said in his firm confident voice, which defied contradiction although William never thought of contradicting him. Mrs. Macartney was a woman in a thousand. "What can you tell me about her?"

And William told him of Mrs. Macartney's brave struggle to bring the two ends of income and expenditure together in that state of life in which it had pleased Providence to place her. Hunter nodded his great head and murmured that it was a pity, a great pity; that women like Mrs. Macartney should be preserved as an example to

the younger generation for which those capable energetic Waloo women should be a warning, a terrible warning. He shuddered as he remembered the warning, and he was still talking of it when Williamina went to bed and left the two men smoking on the porch.

"Then the little girl isn't yours?" Hunter asked at once. It was as if he had only waited for her to go to put the question.

William bristled indignantly. "Sure, she's mine! Didn't I fish her out of the river? I reckon that gives me a pretty good claim to her. And I've taken care of her for nine years, and I reckon that gives me another good claim."

"It's good just as long as no one contests it," Hunter told him with his royal air of knowing everything. "Legally the claim of her parents would come first. So you never married, Bill?"

William shrugged his shoulders. "How could I? The doctor gave me a year at the most. I couldn't ask any girl to be a widow. You know, Hunt, how wild I was over Evelyn Wentworth? I think she cared for me—a little, but after I found out I was a dead one I put her right out of my thoughts. Perhaps it wasn't fair to her. I'll confess now that I was all shot to pieces. Shows how much moral stamina I had, not enough to stand up like a man and take my medicine. I

had to sneak off like a cur. But I've thanked my lucky stars many times that I hadn't asked Evelyn to marry me."

Hunter smoked meditatively. "Fine girl, Evelyn Wentworth," he said at last. "She's married, you know, married an assistant professor at the old school. She was fat and gray and had five kids when I was back there last summer. You'd never know her."

William shuddered. The Evelyn he had known had not been fat nor gray. "I hope to the Lord I never will see her," he said fervently. "I prefer my own picture, slim and graceful and with a sleek black head. She had the blackest hair I ever saw. There's a girl down here who makes me think of Evelyn as she was." He smiled as he pictured Helen Spafford's black head. "Didn't you ever marry, Hunt?"

"Nope. Too busy. Never had time to find the girl, the ring and the minister at the same time. I'm a cranky old bachelor all right. I haven't even found a kid in the bulrushes to keep me company. Funny you never learned where she came from."

"Well, I did my best." And William told him what his best had been, and as he related the incidents of that long ago stormy night which had

given him Williamina, Hunter took the cigar from his mouth and sat up straighter.

"Nine years ago this July," he repeated. "I say, Bill, I know a woman——"

William groaned. "Not you, too, Hunt," he said. "Don't tell me you have found Williamina's mother. There are six of them on the list now."

"But listen, Bill, just listen," Hunter shook his finger under William's nose to hold his attention. "There's a woman I know had a kid ten years ago——"

William raised a weary hand. "Oh, Lord, Hunt, if you knew the number of times I've heard that!"

"Well, but listen, can't you," impatiently. People usually listened when he spoke. "This woman, Mrs. Benham, as nice a little woman as there is, wasn't very well after her kid came and Benham took her about a lot and left the child with a nurse. They were west, in the mountains, when they received word that their summer home, up the river, had been blown away in a cyclone, and that the kid and the nurse were missing. The Benhams came home at once but they never heard a word of the child. That was in July, 1907. I remember the exact date. Benham died the next winter. By Jove, think what it would mean to

give Mrs. Benham back her child." He stopped to think what it would mean.

William had listened at first a little sceptically but as Hunter went on and told a story which exactly matched the theory William had given up at the Knox cottage not two hours before he rose to his feet. "But you haven't any proof!" he exclaimed, finding it hard to speak because his throat was so dry and contracted. "It would be cruel to raise her hopes for nothing."

"But you must have some clue, clothes or ribbons or a mark of some kind?"

William shook his head. There was not a mark on Williamina's little body and her clothes had been unmarked, also. "There wasn't a clue of any sort," he insisted. "Good Lord, man! Don't you suppose I made sure? I didn't want to keep her, I did my best to find her people but I couldn't find them, and now I'm through. Williamina belongs to me." And his mouth shut in a way that should have told Hunter that William kept what belonged to him.

"Just because you did what you should once is no reason why you should refuse to be decent now," Hunter told him sharply. "It's queer, damned queer. You know, Bill, I never believed much in Fate but now—by George, I never went to sleep in a fool rowboat before. Why did I

do it? Why did I drift down here unless I was to find Mrs. Benham's child for her! Tell me that, if you can?" He knew William couldn't tell him.

"Oh, shut up, Hunt!" William walked up and down the porch with hasty steps. "How should I know? Perhaps it was to find me again. But if you are going to jaw about Bill's mother, I wish you had stayed in Waloo. I'm about fed up with that sort of thing. If Bill's people ever turn up and convince me that they are her people I'll have to talk to them but I'm not going to have the child harrowed up, nor be harrowed up myself, by the possibility every one who sees her offers of finding a mother for her. Now if you can talk of something else I'll smoke another pipe but if this Mrs. Benham is all you have in your mind we'd better go to bed."

"Oh, very well, if that's the way you feel." Hunter was offended and showed it. His advice had never been received so ungratefully. People usually listened when he spoke. "Living alone the way you have makes a man selfish and self-centered, doesn't it? I'll not say anything, but I'll talk it over with Mrs. Benham. Why the child looks like her. Blood will tell, and she has Mrs. Benham's eyes!" triumphantly.

"What color are this Mrs. Benham's eyes?"

"William," she murmured sleepily, "William, darling."

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William asked from the other end of the porch.

"They're—" began Hunter confidently enough and then he stopped. "Well, by thunder, I don't know. Yes, I do, they're brown. I remember Benham used to call 'em brown velvet." He refused to meet William's eyes as he described those of Mrs. Benham.

It was just as well, for William's were full of scorn. There was scorn also in William's voice as he said coldly. "Williamina's eyes are blue, dark blue. I don't give much for your powers of observation that you didn't see that, Hunt." How could a man with two eyes of his own miss the lovely color in Williamina's eyes.

"I'll show you I know what I'm talking about." Hunter was so sure that he was right that he refused to be discouraged by a little mistake. "Mrs. Benham is up the river, at Rogers'. I'll take you up and show you that her eyes are—" he hesitated.

"Blue velvet, I suppose you'll say now," broke in William. "Leave your Mrs. Benham alone, Hunt, and leave Bill and me alone. We're happy and contented. Leave us alone. Better come up to bed now."

There was a decided edge to his voice. He almost wished that Williamina had left his old friend in the river. The fact that Hunter Olney

had been his oldest and best friend did not give him the right to meddle in his affairs. He had been fond of Hunt in the old days but he would not be fond of him now if he would insist on trying to find Williamina's people. And anyway, this man was not his old friend. The Hunt he knew had had more waist and less determination. William had a helpless feeling as he looked at Hunter and heard the determination in his voice. He felt that if Hunter wanted to find Williamina's mother he would find her. He began to understand why Hunter Olney had become one of the kings of America.

Before he went to bed William went to look at Williamina, who lay curled in a knot, her flushed face in a tangle of yellow hair. He stood in front of the light to shade it, but she stirred uneasily.

"William," she murmured sleepily. "William, darling."

William drew the sheet up over her shoulders and patted her gently. Her fingers found his and clung to them. There was no doubt that waking or sleeping, William filled Williamina's small heart. As for William he sat on the bed beside her until her fingers fell from his, and he never knew whether it was for hours or moments.

CHAPTER XV

WILLIAMINA was the first one up the next morning, and when she was dressed she slipped in to William, who lay with frowning brows and clenched hands as if his dreams troubled him. Williamina dropped a light kiss on one of the brown hands, but, light as it was, William felt it and opened his eyes.

"Hello, Bill," he murmured sleepily. "Time to get up?"

"Well," Williamina told him, as she cuddled down beside him, "I was awake, and it was a new day so I got up to see what it would give me. You know, William, darling, the circus comes tomorrow. I don't see how I can wait twenty-four more hours to see that hippopotamus. Do you suppose he will have a horn on his upper lip? I'm glad the Lord didn't put one on my upper lip." She felt of her upper lip to make sure that it hadn't a horn. "You know I've never seen a circus any place but on the billboard. It's splendid there. It doesn't seem as if the real circus ever could be as

beautiful and wonderful as I imagine it will be," she sighed.

"There isn't much that is as beautiful as we imagine it will be, Bill." And William sighed, too. "But you don't have to bother about that for several years. That's why you want to keep your imagination bright and shining as long as you can."

"I shall," she promised earnestly. "I'll keep it forever and shine it up every once in a while, even if I live to be over ninety, as you said I would. I can't give it away because it's fastened somewhere tight inside of me."

"That is lucky, very lucky," laughed William, with a squeeze for her small waist. "Run along, now, and I'll get up. I want to see what this new day will give, too." He frowned as he remembered what the last old day had brought.

"It's so wonderful to have a new day ready for you every morning when you wake up. I think it's a splendid present from old Father Time, don't you?"

"I do. Even if we do waste it and throw it away so often. I didn't always think so. There was a time when I considered it a burden."

Bright and shining as Williamina kept her imagination she could not imagine how anyone could look upon a new day as a burden, and she stared at him with big round eyes.

"Oh, William!" she cried. "You couldn't have thought that!"

"I did for years and years, until I found you to show me that it was a blessing. Skip, now, I am going to get up."

Hunter Olney heard them, and was out of his bed and into his clothes and a beautiful and obliging temper by the time Louis had breakfast on the table. Hunter looked at Williamina a little more closely than he had the night before, as if he were trying to decide whether her eyes matched a special shade of blue velvet. He was determined to make friends with Williamina, which was the easiest thing in the world, for Williamina was a very friendly young person. She was ever ready to go two-thirds, if not the entire way, on the road to Friendship.

"The first word I heard this morning was circus," Hunter said, as he finished his berries and smiled on the just and the unjust as represented by Williamina and William.

Williamina looked up interested by that last fascinating word. "Have you ever been to one?" she asked eagerly. "I never have. Dave Macartney has once, when he was in the city to have his tonsils out, and he said it was worth it. William's been, too, when he was a little boy, and Miss Helen and Marietta and Mr. Brown and every-

body but me. It costs money to go, you know," as if that was the reason she had been deprived of a circus. "But Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler, the grocery man at the trolley, told me to put it up to my hens, and I did. We haven't eaten an egg since, have we, William? This afternoon I'm going to take them to Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler, and if he pays me enough we're all going to the circus. I'll take you with us, if you want to go?" she offered generously.

"We'll go, no matter what Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler pays," Hunter exclaimed promptly. How impulsive she was—and generous and confiding; she believed anything that was told to her, just as Mrs. Benham did. "I haven't been to a circus for years. We'll have a party and all go."

"Oh!" Williamina clapped her hands. "Even if the hens haven't done enough?" She wanted to be sure.

"We won't pay any attention to the hens. We'll eat the eggs ourselves."

Williamina clapped her hands again. It seemed too good to be true. My, but she was glad she had found him in the bulrushes! "How large a party?" she asked eagerly.

"Go as far as you like," offered Hunter. "I say, Bill, you do yourself pretty well, don't you?"

For Louis placed a second brook trout, which had been broiled to perfection, before him. "I've never had such trout, even at my club. And I'll have another cup of coffee. My cook can't make real coffee like this. I haven't eaten such a breakfast in years."

"As far as I like," repeated Williamina, as if she couldn't believe that he could mean that far. "Are you sure? There's Mrs. Macartney, you know, and Dave, and Miss Helen and Marietta, and old Mr. Brewer and his nephew, if he comes before we start, and Danny Simms and——"

"Hold hard, Bill," laughed William. "Don't look a gift horse in the face."

"But he said—" Williamina began doubtfully. Of course Mr. Olney hadn't meant it. Grown people so seldom meant what they said.

Hunter was not like other grown people, for he leaned over and patted Williamina's plump fist as it rested on the table.

"I certainly did say it," he said in a most regal manner. "And what is more, I meant it. Keep still, Bill, and let her alone. I'm good for a circus party of any size. Go on, Williamina. Who comes after Danny Simms?"

"Well, I know the three Nelson children and the milkman's twins and their brothers and sisters, and there's Mary and Elsie that I met at Mar-

ietta's friend's house. I'm sure they'd like to go. And, oh, yes, Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler, the two of them, and all their children," she added timidly. Perhaps she was going too far.

William laughed. "It isn't necessary, Bill, to invite all your acquaintances to a party. It is customary to choose only your friends."

"But they are my friends." To Williamina friends and acquaintances were synonymous. "Really and truly, William Kirwin, everyone I know is my friend!"

"I wish I could make such a statement. I say, Bill, do you remember once when we were kids and a circus came to town, we made up our minds to get up and see it come in? Some one told us the train would pull in at five o'clock, and we were so afraid we'd be late that we set our alarm clock for one. Your father heard us when we went downstairs and made us go back to bed. We overslept and never got around until time for the parade." Hunter smiled at the recollection of that long ago day.

"Did you ever see one come in?" asked Williamina.

"Sure we did. When the next circus came to town we were up and ready to welcome it. Remember, Bill?" The corners of his mouth twisted

up as Hunter remembered what was evidently a pleasant memory.

The corners of William's mouth twisted up, also. "It's one of the things you don't forget. Lord, it's a shame that age and experience tear away the mystery even from a circus."

"Will the party be for the circus to come in?" Williamina hoped it would.

"It will not!" Hunter told her most emphatically. "I never get up now until the world is aired and warmed, not even to see an elephant or a tiger. Your party, young woman, is for—" He hesitated and looked at William.

"The afternoon performance," suggested William.

Afternoon or evening, either would be a treat to a child who had never been to a circus, and Williamina waited impatiently for the two men to finish their breakfast that she might deliver her invitations. She began with Louis, but unfortunately he was going to make strawberry jam and he knew he would not be through in time for the afternoon performance. If she wanted to give him a ticket he'd try and go in the evening. Mrs. Macartney refused outright.

"It is always so hot at a circus," she explained. "Thank you, Williamina, but I'd rather not go."

Williamina could not understand how she could

refuse. Neither could Dave. Hot! Who cared for a little heat? There would be plenty of lemonade, pink or white, and ice cream cones. But Mrs. Macartney refused to be enticed from her cool shady room by pink lemonade or an ice cream cone.

Helen and Marietta accepted at once and in a way to please any hostess.

"Imagine going to the circus with the breakfast-food king!" chuckled Marietta. "Oh, Williamina, will he wear his crown?"

"I don't think so," Williamina answered, with serious regret. "He couldn't. He didn't bring it. He didn't bring any baggage," she added hastily, for fear Marietta might think it strange the breakfast-food king had not brought his crown. "Can't you come, Mr. Brown?" She turned to him eagerly. "Don't you suppose the doctor would let you if you'd promise to be very careful?"

"Indeed he wouldn't." Nurse Butters answered for her patient. "And if he did, I shouldn't. So there, Williamina, you needn't tease. It's all very well to be quick about putting the bread in the oven, but you shouldn't hurry the baking."

"Why not?" Of course Williamina wanted to know. She had watched Louis bake hundreds of

times, but he had never told her the loaves shouldn't be hurried.

"It'd be all doughy in the middle." Nurse Butters made a wry face as she explained. "And that's the way with Mr. Brown's bones. If he hurries them too fast they won't knit all the way through."

Williamina looked at Bobby with an awe which did not diminish when he winked at her. The only kind of knitting she knew about Marietta was doing with four needles and a ball of gray yarn, and she called it socks for the soldiers. But Bobby's ribs couldn't knit that way. She found the bread comparison easier to understand, and she did not want Bobby's ribs to be all doughy on the inside.

"I'm sorry," she said, and she said it so heartily that Bobby patted her shoulder as she stood beside him.

"Bring me a bag of peanuts," he said, "and I'll eat them on the sly. And you might bring Nurse Butters a balloon." He laughed, because a balloon would be the last thing that Nurse Butters would want.

But Nurse Butters did not laugh. "I wish you would," she said quite soberly. "I've never had a balloon in all my life. They're pretty, and I like to watch them, but it seemed foolish for a lady of

my age and size to be buying balloons to play with. A present is a very different thing."

"But can't Nurse Butters come, either?" Williamina was very sorry for Nurse Butters and very sorry for herself. Her party didn't promise to be much of a party.

"As if I'd leave my patient for any circus in the world!" exclaimed Nurse Butters as she went in to get her patient a glass of milk.

"Don't tease her," begged Bobby. "If she should go they'd be sure to keep her for the fat woman, and then who would take care of my bones?"

"She isn't as fat as she was when I found her," whispered Williamina, "not by ten pounds. She told me so yesterday." She spoke regretfully, for until Nurse Butters found the ten pounds she had lost the night of the storm she would remain neatly buttoned in her white uniform and never do what Williamina hoped she would be able to see her do.

Hunter Olney obligingly walked over to the store with Williamina, and was properly amazed and impressed at the billboard. He was even more pleased by the neat display of Hearts of Wheat in the store window.

"It has a very good sale around here," Mr.

Smith-an'-Wobbler kindly told him. "People seem to like it."

"They should like it," Hunter told him in his emphatic way. "It's good and pure and healthy. I know, because I make it."

Williamina pulled his sleeve. "Please," she whispered, "we didn't come to talk about breakfast food. We came to ask Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler to the party."

Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler turned red as far as Williamina could see when he received the invitation to the cereal king's circus party, and he declined it regretfully.

"You see, Williamina," he explained, "the circus man gave us free tickets. It ain't necessary for us to pay a cent. You better ask some one who can't go free."

"That's fine to go as the guest of the circus," Hunter exclaimed as he saw Williamina's lip quiver. "Now, I wonder if you have any chocolates that a young lady could eat?"

Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler had, fresh that morning, and no chocolates could be fresher than that. And armed with a huge box of many varieties Williamina took her new friend to old Mr. Knox's cottage.

The second Hunter Olney saw Helen's black head he recalled what William had said the night

before about black heads. Evelyn Wentworth at her best had never been as pretty as Helen was that afternoon in a gown of white voile all tucks and little frills.

"So that's what's up with old Bill," Hunter told himself wisely. Ever since he had found his old friend he had been trying to understand how William was content to stay in this out-of-the-way God-forsaken place. Hunter would not have stayed a week unless he had been handcuffed and tied and old Bill had stayed there—it hurt Hunter to think how long old Bill had been there. Old Bill, who had been so full of enthusiasm and ambition. Well, if old Bill wanted this pretty black-haired girl he should have her. Helen was young, but that was old Bill's concern. What was too young for one man was often just the right age for another. He himself had never cared for lamb. He preferred mutton, but if old Bill liked lamb he should have lamb. And if Williamina stood in the way, as she might very well do even if she was a nice little thing, why Williamina did not belong to Bill. She belonged to Mrs. Benham, oh, he knew she did, and he would make it a point to see that Williamina was placed where she belonged. It would be all right now that he was there to handle the situation. Old Bill could take the frown from his face and Helen the little

wrinkle from between her eyebrows. He had been quick to see how the land lay, he chuckled to himself, and he would be able to make it smooth for old Bill, old Bill, who had just about let his morbid ideas ruin his life. Old Bill should see that he could play the rôle of fairy godfather as easily and effectively as he had become king of the breakfast foods. He smiled at Helen as if she were already the promised bride of his old friend. There was far more than courtesy in his manner to her, and both Marietta and Bobby saw it.

"Our friend, the king, made it very plain that he prefers black heads to red," Marietta said ruefully after Williamina and Hunter had gone.

"Nonsense, Marietta," murmured Helen, flying a red flag in each cheek.

"No nonsense at all. I leave it to Mr. Brown."

Marietta left it to him with such an impudent smile and such a saucy tilt of her head that Bobby was enchanted.

"What do we care about any king?" he said so that Marietta alone heard. "We're democrats. And a red head for me every time. There's my hand on it."

Marietta hesitated and looked at the hand he held out before she placed her fingers on it. His hand closed over hers and he had the strangest, the oddest sensation. It was as if her hand had

closed over his heart. He could not breathe for a moment. He could only lie there and look at her. "You've—you've been heavenly good to me," he murmured at last. "I can't ever repay you."

"Don't be so sure," she laughed, trying to release the fingers he clasped so tight. "We haven't sent in our bill yet. You may be able to manage the board and lodging, but the attendance— The attendance—!" She paused, as if the attendance could never be put in figures.

He refused to be frightened or to let the fluttering fingers free. "It will take a lifetime," he insisted.

Marietta's face was a pink rose as she repeated his words. "A lifetime! Did you hear that, Helen?"

Helen gave a little start. She had been trying to erect a castle on Spanish territory, and she realized, even before Marietta called to her, that her materials were hopelessly inadequate. "What?" she asked listlessly.

CHAPTER XVI

I DOUBT if anyone but William would have done what William did the next morning. Long, long before the sun was up he was out of his bed and dressed. He wakened Williamina very gently. She sat up and rubbed her eyes.

"Are you just coming to bed, William, dear?" she asked sleepily. Her eyes were as sleepy as her mouth. She did not seem to be able to keep them open.

"I'm just getting up," William told her in a whisper. "You are going to get up, too, if you want to come with me and see the circus come to town."

Like magic the sleep was banished from Williamina's lips and from her eyes; indeed, both popped wide open.

"William! William Kirwin!" Williamina could not believe her own pink ears. "However did you know I wanted to see the circus come to town more than anything in this world? Are you really going to take me?"

"If you are ready in ten minutes," promised William.

"But the trolley doesn't run in the middle of the night." Williamina snatched wildly at her stockings and pulled them on with fingers that would shake. "Are we going to walk to Mifflin?"

"We are not. I wouldn't take a twelve mile walk at dawn even to please you, Bill. We are going in the chicken car. Mrs. Macartney has loaned it to me for the day, and I only hope that it will take us to town before it breaks down. Eight minutes, now, Bill," he warned.

Eight minutes are not very long, but they were long enough for Williamina to slip into the rest of her clothes, give her hair a hurried brush, and even wash behind her ears. She was tying her hair ribbon as she ran downstairs to find that William had a bowl of bread and milk ready for her. He had a bowl for himself, also, but before they had taken one spoonful Hunter Olney called crossly from above:

"What the deuce is the matter?"

"We're going to see the circus come in the way you and William did when you were little bits of boys," Williamina answered in the hushed voice that seemed to fit the early morning hour, but if her voice was hushed it was jubilant.

"The deuce you are," grumbled Hunter. "Bill, you're a fool."

"That's as may be." William ate his bread and milk serenely. "But from my point of view you can't give a child anything more valuable than memories. Judging from the way you took out a few of yours yesterday and gloated over them you think considerable of them yourself. You like to remember when you got up to see a circus come in, and by that same token Bill is going to like to remember the days of her youth when she is fat and gray."

"Oh, I shall," breathed Williamina between spoonfuls of bread and milk. "I truly shall, William, darling!"

There was silence for a moment and then there was a thud as if a heavy body had met an unmovable body and then a mad scramble.

"Wait a minute," called Hunter. "I'll go with you. I'm a darned fool, but I'll have company."

"A man's mighty lonesome in this world if he isn't a fool occasionally," laughed William. "I'll give you ten minutes, Hunt."

Although Hunter had no hair ribbons to tie, he took more than ten minutes and came down at last frowning and grumbling. He turned away from the glass of milk William offered him and grumbled louder that he was a fool in the com-

pany of fools. Williamina found her coat and hat, and William put on his raincoat and found his hat, for the morning air was so new that it was coolly fresh. Hunter jerked on William's overcoat and caught up his hat and followed William and Williamina out into the gray mist where anything might happen.

They found Dave asleep in the chicken car, for Dave was not going to take a chance of being forgotten. He opened his eyes and grunted when William lifted Williamina in beside him. Hunter climbed in at the back, still grumbling that he was several different kinds of a fool and that all he was thankful for was that certain fat, pudgy financiers and thin, hawk-like reporters in Waloo could not see him now.

As William drove the car past the Wayside Farm a hand waved from an upper window, and Mrs. Macartney called to them to be sure and get a hot breakfast somewhere and not to let Williamina be trampled under any elephant.

"A sensible woman," yawned Hunter. "Every word direct and to the point. Did you notice that, Bill?"

If she lived to be a hundred, Williamina knew she never would forget that morning. First there was the long ride over the country road which they had to themselves. It was not until they

were in Mifflin that the sun popped up as if it, too, must go to the circus. It was the jolliest kind of a sun, big and round and yellow, and it seemed to laugh as it promised Williamina a fine day. There was not a cloud in the blue taffeta sky, not so much as one white fleece. Williamina called William's attention to the fact, for she was wide awake now and in a fever of excitement. Behind her Hunter Olney shivered and asked pathetically if anyone could tell him why he had left his warm bed to make a confounded fool of himself.

Williamina twisted around to tell him. "You've come to collect a memory. William told you that before we left the shack."

As they turned into the street that led to the circus grounds they began to see people's shadowy shapes flitting hurriedly before them. The most of them were abbreviated, boyish young ghosts, but as they rounded the corner and could see the circus ground at the end of the street they met a tall gray shape moving majestically toward them. It was like nothing Williamina had ever seen out of a picture book, but she recognized it at once and drew a quick breath.

"Elephants!" she shrieked. "Oh, Dave, it's a really truly living elephant."

Dave grunted in a most superior manner. He

refused to become excited over any living elephant when he had seen one in Waloo during that memorable week which had robbed him of his tonsils. But Hunter Olney stopped grumbling and looked about and sniffed.

"Brings it all back, doesn't it, Bill? By Jove! There was a time when an elephant was the wonder of the world!"

"What is now, Mr. Olney?" Williamina tore her eyes from the elephant to ask. "What is the wonder of the world to you now?"

Mr. Olney leaned forward and pulled her hair and told her she was, and that if he could find a kid like her he didn't know but he would like to have a wonder for his own.

"Oh, but I belong to William!" Williamina told him quickly, and she caught William's sleeve in her fingers. "Don't I, William, dear? And anyway, I should think you'd rather have a little boy. Here's Dave. You can have him, can't he, Dave? You haven't any father," she reminded Dave in an undertone.

"But Dave has a mother," objected Hunter, conscious of a chuckle from somewhere in the neighborhood of William.

"A boy needs a father as well as a mother. Mrs. Macartney said so, and Dave thinks so, too, don't you, Dave?"

Dave did not deny that he thought so. He mumbled uncomfortably that most fellows had fathers, and he didn't know but he would like one if he could find the right kind.

"You see?" Williamina nodded at Hunter. "You may have Dave."

"Look, Bill." William touched her shoulders and as she obeyed him, she forgot Dave and Hunter Olney. "They're going to put up the big tent."

"Can't we get out and go closer?" Dave jumped to his feet. "I'm not going to stay here."

"We'll all get out," shivered Hunter. "A little walk will start the blood running through our veins. I'm cold."

Williamina was cold, too, but it was a different cold from that which comes from a lack of heat. She liked to feel the shivery shudders which traveled up and down her backbone. She slipped her hand into William's and clutched his fingers tight as they went nearer to watch the men put up the big tent. Even chilled Hunter admired the rhythmic precision with which the men drove the stakes.

"That's efficiency," he was heard to murmur.

By the time the big tent was up, the animal wagons, each one a red and gold mystery, began to roll in, the camels padded up with their keepers and sniffed scornfully at Williamina, as if they

thought she should be home and in bed. Even the elephants lifted questioning trunks which seemed to say, "Dear, dear! Is Williamina here?" when she went near them. Hunter spoke to one of the attendants in the manner which always made people run to do his bidding, and when the man grinned an answer, he turned to Williamina.

"Want to see the animals fed?" he asked carelessly. Perhaps he did not know what a jewel of great price he was offering her for her memory.

Williamina squealed, she could not help it, and the camels sniffed again and the elephants grunted, but Williamina was dancing on her toes and did not care for their scorn.

"May we?" she cried. "The camels and the tigers and everyone?"

Even the attendants, to whom feeding lions and tigers was all in the day's work, laughed as if they had never appreciated their task before, and they even went so far as to offer to let Williamina and Dave help feed their charges.

I doubt if any children ever collected a more radiant memory than the one Dave and Williamina stored away that early morning, for it is wonderful, when you are ten, to help feed lions and tigers and zebras and a hippopotamus and all the other strange creatures that you never really believed could be in the world because you had

never seen them out of books. Williamina's cheeks were as pink as a rose and Dave's freckles were lost in a red sea when they stood before the snakes, the last of the cages to receive attention. Williamina turned away from them with a feeling of unexplained antagonism. She did not wish to see them fed.

"I can't like them," she murmured apologetically to William in a low voice, so that the big writhing snake in front of the cage should not hear.

"But they are as hungry as the bears," William told her. "See what beautiful overcoats they have, Bill. Watch the color on that big fellow in the corner. There's harmony for you."

"Do you suppose Joseph's coat had as many colors?" Williamina watched the color harmony for a moment and then shook her head. "Perhaps their overcoats are beautiful, William, but I can't really like them. I—I don't see how Eve ever got acquainted enough with one to take an apple from him, do you?"

The kitchen tent had been raised long before they reached the snakes, and the smell of coffee came to them most appetizingly. They walked over to see the domain of the big cook, and when Hunter had had a word with him, in his regal

manner, the cook laughed and offered them coffee and sandwiches.

"You fellows know what system is," Hunter told him with real admiration. "I believe that our present day efficiency must have started in a circus."

"Maybe." The cook was not interested in efficiency. "Hadn't you better take the little girl over there," he nodded toward the dining tent, "and I'll have a couple of eggs ready for her in a jiffy."

"Isn't he kind?" whispered Williamina, who had been clinging to William's hand as if she was glad to have something familiar to cling to in this new and strange world. "I wish I had something to give him. There's a brand new rabbit if I'd only thought to bring it."

"Never mind. I don't believe he would care for a rabbit," William whispered back. "I expect he has all the animals he wants."

But it was Williamina's way to mind, and when the cook brought the big platter of eggs she took a button from her coat and handed it to him.

"I'd like to give you a brand new rabbit I have at home," she said, her eyes shining, "but I forgot to bring it with me. Perhaps you'd just as soon have this."

The cook looked at the button, which adver-

tised a certain flour which Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler had for sale. "I'd much rather," he was polite enough to say. "I don't care much for rabbits myself. And we've got so many animals around that all I gotta do when I feel a yearning for anything on four feet is to stroll into the animal tent. I don't miss not having 'em here, at all." He took the button and pinned it on the front of his white apron. He winked at William as he did so, and William solemnly winked back.

If you have never breakfasted in a circus tent just after sunrise on a July morning, you have no idea what a pleasure you have missed. There were so many things to see, so many people to meet, that Williamina did scant justice to the egg the cook had fried on both sides so appetizingly for her. When the others had eaten their eggs, she slipped away to tell the cook again how much obliged she was, and the cook gave her a little cake he had made for Zephrine, a girl no larger than Williamina, who swung on the trapeze with her father.

"Too bad she ain't here," he said. "But she's asleep now, I bet. Circuses ain't no novelty to her," he added apologetically.

"I wish they had been just for this morning," sighed Williamina, who would have loved to make friends with a little girl who was not afraid to

swing from a red rope at the top of the big tent. It made Williamina dizzy just to see the picture. "I'd like to ask her if she is ever afraid. Perhaps you'll give her this?" She reached up to take the button Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler had given William and which she had pinned to the overcoat Hunter Olney wore. "Tell her it's from a little girl who'd like to know her. I'll see her this afternoon and wave to her. And perhaps she'll wear the button to let me see she'd like to be my friend."

"I expect she will. She could wear it in the parade, anyway. You look out for her. Queer little kid, ain't she?" he confided to Hunter, when Williamina had run away. "Seems like she wants to give something to everybody."

"She believes you have to give if you want to get." Hunter smiled indulgently as he explained Williamina's creed to the big cook.

He stared and scratched his head. "Well," he said slowly, "I dunno but she's right. You can't get something for nothing in this world. I know, for I tried it. But giving—why, giving—what the devil has a man like me got to give?" And he looked at Hunter as if he should like to be told.

"Just what you have given," Hunter said without waiting a second. "A cordial welcome and a darned good breakfast."

"Oh, go on." The big cook was horribly em-

barrassed by the open praise. "That's my business—to hand out good breakfasts."

More and more people were pouring into the circus grounds, but not one of them saw as much as Williamina saw. Perhaps that was because she was with a king and the royal hand went into the royal pocket many times; perhaps it was because Williamina was so openly enthusiastic, or perhaps it was because William was so pleasantly friendly to everyone.

"Is the circus better than this?" Williamina didn't see how it could be.

"You can tell me this afternoon," suggested William. "Now, I think we'll climb into the chicken car and go down to the Mifflin House and take a nap. Then we'll be fresh for the parade."

Williamina would have protested that she was fresh enough without any nap, but her flushed cheeks and her heavy eyes betrayed her. She had to admit that she was tired and sleepy, and much as she disliked to leave the circus, a bed in the Mifflin House would be another experience to pack away in her memory. She had never slept at the Mifflin House. Dave refused outright to leave. He would only give a reluctant promise to join them at the hotel for an early lunch.

"The rest of the party is coming in for lunch, Miss Helen and Marietta," Williamina said

proudly as they went to find the chicken car. "It isn't a very big party, is it? William was afraid it might be too big for your pocketbook, but it isn't, is it?"

"Not a bit too big," Hunter said kindly.

It seemed to Williamina that her head only touched the pillow of the Mifflin House bed before she was awakened by the strangest noise she had ever heard. It sounded something like music, only it wasn't real music. She was off the bed and at the window in a twinkle.

"What is it?" she cried. "William, what can it be? You haven't anything on our victrola like that."

"Thank Heaven we haven't," murmured William. "That's a calliope, Bill, and it means that we must get busy if we want to see the parade. Brush your hair, and we'll go out on the porch."

"Where's Mr. Olney?" Williamina didn't see how she was ever to brush her hair with such shaking hands as she had.

William helped her. "Sound asleep."

"Doesn't he want to come? Doesn't he want a parade in his memory?" Williamina had little idea what a parade was, but she did not see how a memory could be complete without one.

"His memory has a parade. He put one in thirty-five years ago."

"And don't they ever wear out?" She didn't see how even the memory of a circus parade could last such an eternity as thirty-five years.

"That's the good thing about a memory, what you put in never wears out," William solemnly assured her as they went down the long hall to the porch where Helen and Marietta in crisp white from their Panama hats to their canvas shoes were waiting for them.

The first glimpse of the red-coated band in its glittering wagon carried Williamina out of prosaic Mifflin into another world. She jumped up and down, she cried out in amazement, she waved her hand, she clutched William's hand and stood still, stunned by the wonders passing before her. The other people on the hotel porch found her more amusing than the parade, which to everyone but Williamina was rather a shabby affair. They would have found fault with the elephants and criticized the camels if Williamina had not admired them so extravagantly. A little girl perched on the tallest camel made Williamina catch William's sleeve.

"Do you suppose she can be Zephrine, and that she is wearing the button I gave her to show we are friends?" she whispered. "Oh, William, do you suppose she is?"

She waved her hand, and the little girl in the

red frock on the top of the tallest camel waved her hand.

"She knows me! She knows me!" Williamina was wild with delight. "The cook really did tell her. Oh, William, isn't she like a princess? Wouldn't I love a camel or an elephant to ride? Do you suppose we could make room for one? I know how to feed them, you know, because I helped this morning. Oh, William!" She forgot the camels as she pointed a trembling finger at an open cage in which two lions cowered in the corner while a man in white tights and holding a whip in his hand, sat in the center. "There's Daniel in the lion's den."

In the crowd that followed the white-faced clown, driving his little donkey, was Dave, dirty and disheveled. Marietta saw him and sent William down to bring him up. Nothing but a yawning, gaping hole inside of him made Dave willing to join the little group on the porch. He looked pityingly at Williamina as she tried to tell him what she had seen. Why, she hadn't seen anything in comparison with what he had.

"I don't care," she tossed her head. "My memory is so full now I don't know as it will hold another thing."

What a luncheon they had! Hunter let each order what he pleased and sent a special messen-

ger with a twisted bit of green paper from his royal pocket to the cook. Dave grumbled because Marietta made him waste room in the big gaping hole inside of him on soup and steak when he knew he could fill it up with ice cream and pie. But Marietta was as firm as Marietta could be, and the space had to be wasted.

As they left the hotel for the circus grounds again they stood beside the chicken car while William decided how he would pack them into it, and Hunter grumbled because he had a big seven-passenger car in Waloo that was eating its head off. He had to explain that grumble to Williamina, who was unable to see how an automobile could eat its head off when it hadn't any head. He was still explaining when Dr. Grey came toward them.

"Oh!" Williamina forgot about motor appetites and turned scarlet with shame. "I never asked Dr. Grey to go with us. And he was so good to me when I had the measles."

"It's not too late," suggested William, as Dr. Grey stopped beside them. "Perhaps he won't mind a belated invitation."

Evidently he didn't, for he accepted it at once. He had to go to his office first, but he would meet them at the grounds.

"May I take one of you in my car?" he said,

red frock on the top of the tallest camel waved her hand.

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"May I take one of you in my car?" he said,

counting noses and seats in the chicken car. "You come with me"—he hesitated as if it were difficult to make a choice, and Marietta straightened her spine expectantly—"Miss Spafford!" the doctor finished explosively.

"Oh!" Helen looked up in surprise. There was nothing she had expected less than an invitation to ride with the doctor.

"Yes, go with him," William said quickly.

"Bill!" exclaimed Hunter with an indignant glance. Even if old Bill was jealous he shouldn't be reckless. "I'll go with you, doctor," he offered hurriedly.

But Dr. Grey didn't want Hunter Olney and let him see that he didn't so plainly that Hunter stuttered and sputtered and looked appealingly at Marietta. Wouldn't she offer? Didn't she understand? But Marietta only stood with her back to the doctor, her eyes on some distant point up the street.

"We could all crowd into this chicken car," William smiled at Helen, "but you'll be far more comfortable with Dr. Grey."

Helen looked at William appealingly. It made Hunter sick to see William disregard that look. What did Helen care for comfort? She would love to be crowded into the chicken car so long as William was there. Didn't he know that? He

couldn't know it, or he wouldn't see it, for in spite of a sharp nudge from Hunter, William only said again that she had better go with the doctor.

"Jealous as the dickens," murmured Hunter to no one in particular as he obeyed William's command to follow Marietta into the chicken car. He began to realize that it might not be an easy task to help William.

"We'll meet you at the grounds," William was saying to Helen and the doctor as he lifted Williamina in beside Dave and took the wheel.

CHAPTER XVII

IF Helen Spafford had been marooned alone on a desert island she could not have felt more forlorn, nor more deserted than she did when the chicken car drove up the street without her. From the tonneau Marietta and Hunter Olney looked back at her with puzzled astonishment. But they could not look half as astonished nor half as puzzled as Helen felt. Her sense of injury doubled when she saw the chicken car roll to the curb at the end of the block for Mr. Brewer to climb in beside William and take Williamina on his knee. Helen bit her lip. If there was room for Mr. Brewer there would have been room for her. There could be but one reason why William had driven away and left her there with Dr. Grey. It was because he did not want her with him. That was as plain as the nose on her face and it hurt. She wanted to cry, she wanted to scream but most of all she wanted to show the occupants of the chicken car, William at least, that she did not care a picayune if they did not want her, for other people did. She

scarcely cared who the other people were, and she looked about a bit hopelessly to find them.

As she looked up the street and down the street and across the street she became aware that right at her elbow a voice was murmuring something. She glanced up to see Dr. Grey, not with a black frown between his eyes but with an eager light in his face that transformed it. Helen's heart gave a great jump as her brain whispered that here was a man who looked as if he wanted her. She could not believe the whisper. Why—why, Dr. Grey always had been so interested in Marietta. She was sure he had. She had talked of his interest to Nurse Butters and they had agreed that Marietta was a very lucky girl because a man as good, as big-hearted and as clever as Dr. Grey was interested in her. But now the same good, big-hearted, clever man had allowed Marietta to drive away in the chicken car and was looking at her as if she were something very rare and precious.

It was very confusing, but it was also very soothing to the big jagged tear William had made in her pride and which had smarted so that tears dimmed her eyes. It enabled her to produce a smile of sorts as Dr. Grey, his voice reeking with satisfaction, as if the gods had given him exactly what he wanted, said:

and churches and schools, he did not fail to mention the Woman's Club, the Dramatic Club, the Fortnightly Bridge Club nor even the Choral Union, the organizations which helped to make Mifflin's social life. If he had been the publicity man of the Commercial club he could not have exploited Mifflin more.

"Do you think a girl, a city girl, could be satisfied here?" he asked as he parked his car and jumped out.

Helen did not look at him as she let him help her from the car. She tried to speak very indifferently, very impersonally. "I don't see why she shouldn't. It's a dear old town."

He smiled and pressed the fingers he held. "That's what I wanted you to say," he remarked with great satisfaction.

The pressure of his fingers was so firm and warm that Helen felt it long after they had found Williamina's party in the animal tent. Hunter looked at her flushed face and groaned inwardly. William had acted like a spoiled child, and it was Hunter who would have to show him that a man couldn't neglect a girl and expect her to forget it. Hunter would have felt hopeless about William's romance if any other man had charge of it, and even as it was, he shook his head and hoped Wil-

liam would be content with what he had done and not pile up trouble for him.

Marietta was clinging to Mr. Brewer, who looked far less cheerful in his white clothes than the chief mourner at a funeral. He did not want to walk beside Marietta but he could not help it. He groaned, too.

It was the doctor who was all smiles, there was not a frown about him, as he asked Williamina how she would like a pair of zebras to drive.

"I'd love them!" The very thought enraptured Williamina. "Wouldn't they be wonderful? Oh, dear, I'd like to have at least one of almost everything—everything but the snakes. I should never care to have a snake."

"You should have been with old Noah in the ark," chuckled Hunter.

Williamina dimpled. "Wouldn't it have been fun! I never realized before what an interesting trip Noah had. A circus man must often feel like him. Oh, Mr. Olney!" she squeezed his hand, "I do think it was wonderful of you to bring us all here together this afternoon."

"You'll think it's more wonderful before we leave." Hunter forgot William's stupidity and squeezed her fingers. "Come on, we'd better go into the big tent."

Williamina slipped her other hand into Wil-

liam's as they walked to the big tent. "I want to sit beside you," she whispered with a tremble in her voice. It meant so much to her, this circus, that there was a tremble in her legs, too.

William smiled down at her. "I couldn't think of sitting anywhere but beside you," he whispered back. "Not even if they offered me a place with the band."

The big tent was full of people, rows and rows of faces ran up and up almost to the top. The band was playing with more noise than music as they walked to their seats in the very center of the reserved section. Williamina was on pins and needles as the usher studied the slips of blue cardboard Hunter gave him. She was so afraid the performance would begin before they were seated. She drew a deep sigh of satisfaction when she found herself in her place between William and Hunter with Dave just beyond Hunter. In front of them were Dr. Grey and Helen, Mr. Brewer and Marietta. Mr. Brewer cringed as he found himself between the two girls. He was sad and solemn instead of joyful and expectant as one should be at a circus. It was plain to everyone in sight of Mr. Brewer that he was not going to enjoy this circus no matter what wonders were performed. He edged away from Marietta as

though she had the plague and found himself nearer Helen. He had a hunted look.

Marietta was no better satisfied with her place. She bent back to whisper to Dave. He kindly rose and changed places with her. Marietta would not sit beside a frown if she could help it. She slipped happily into the seat beside Hunter. She liked his way of doing what he wanted to do. That was what she considered efficient, and Marietta thought she adored efficiency.

"You don't mind if I sit beside you?" she asked Hunter with her best smile. "I'm afraid Mr. Brewer will have apoplexy if I don't."

The seating of his party had not pleased Hunter any more than it had Marietta, but there was nothing he could do so long as William behaved like "a jealous fool." He shrugged his shoulders and gave Marietta the best smile he could under the circumstances. "I want you to sit beside me," he said promptly, but something troubled him and in spite of Marietta's chatter he kept looking from Helen to William and from William to Helen. Jealousy made people do such stupid things. He was going to have his hands full to manage this situation.

The performance began with a procession of wonders around the big ring which reduced Williamina to speechless pulp. She revived enough

to be bewildered and exasperated at the second number.

"I should have another pair of eyes," she said rebelliously, as something marvelous began to happen simultaneously in two rings, on two platforms and in the trapeze swinging under the tent roof. "I can't ever see it all!" she wailed.

"Don't try," advised William. "The same thing is taking place on each platform and in each ring. Just look at the one nearest to you."

"But there might be something different in the other," she murmured fretfully. "I can't trust them. Oh, dear, I wish they wouldn't give so much for your money—for Mr. Olney's money," she corrected herself hurriedly for fear Mr. Olney had heard and might be a wee bit offended, for it was his money which had been spent.

Her eyes were as big as dinner plates and her face was crimson as she tried desperately to see everything. Over her head William grinned at Hunter and Hunter nodded meaningly toward Helen but when William looked at Helen he only saw that she was listening to Dr. Grey. What did Hunt mean? He raised his eyebrows questioningly and Hunter shrugged his shoulders and sighed like a furnace. No wonder William had made such hash of his life.

Hunter was a perfect host. He bought pro-

grams and peanuts and popcorn crisps and ice cream cones, he offered them as much lemonade as they could drink and presented each of his guests with a big palm leaf fan. Williamina had no time for even pink lemonade. Her eyes had swallowed her mouth. When Zephrine came dancing out with her father Williamina rose to her feet and dropped her bag of peanuts, her box of popcorn crisps, and her palm leaf fan to the ground beneath her seat.

"That's my little new friend," she cried so loud that Zephrine could have heard if she had listened. "See, William, she's looking at me. Oh!" for Zephrine was kissing her hand in Williamina's direction. Quickly Williamina's hand flew to her lips. "She knows me, William, she knows me! My, but I'm glad I gave her that button."

Her heart was in her mouth as she watched Zephrine in the trapeze so far above her head. She shut her eyes as the little spangled figure whirled through the air to be caught by her father.

"I'm afraid, William," she shivered. "I'm afraid. Suppose she should fall?"

William slipped a comforting arm around her. "She won't fall. He'll catch her," promised William in such a confident voice that she was com-

forted. "And see, there is a net spread below. She couldn't fall through that."

But even if Williamina could see the net and remembered that William was just like George Washington and never told a lie she did not really enjoy Zephrine's performance, and she was glad when it was over.

"Isn't she accomplished!" she gasped as Zephrine ran away with a final wave of her hands. "It seems as if I couldn't do anything, William." Her education seemed hopelessly inadequate, for she could not swing from a trapeze nor fly through space as Zephrine could. It didn't seem as if she knew anything.

But William just laughed and hugged her to him. "You know enough for me," he said. "And I can't swing from a trapeze, either," he whispered as if it were a great secret.

That made her feel better. If William, who was the cleverest man in the whole world, couldn't swing from a trapeze in green and gold spangled tights, why it didn't matter so much that she couldn't swing from a trapeze in red spangled tights. So she smiled again and exclaimed at the elephants, was amazed at the seals and stunned by the dogs. She had never imagined animals could be so well educated. Only in fairy books had she met four-footed creatures who could do

such amazing deeds. It was just as if she had slipped between the covers of one of her tattered volumes. She felt as Alice must have felt when she made friends with the Mock Turtle, the White Rabbit and the Gryphon. It came to an end all too soon, although her eyes ached and her mouth was dry and needed a big glass of pink lemonade. She sat in a happy trance while all about her people were moving.

"All over," Hunter said at last. "Do you want to stay for the concert?"

"I think we have had as much as we can stand," William smiled. "Well, honey bunch," he picked Williamina up and stood her on her feet, "what do you think of a circus?"

Williamina gave a happy tired sigh. "I wish it was just beginning," she said. "I love circuses. I can't thank you, Mr. Olney, for giving me one to put in my memory. I'll keep it forever," she promised solemnly.

As they made their way with the crowd out into the fresh air Williamina found herself beside Mr. Brewer, who still looked like the chief mourner at a funeral instead of a guest at a circus party.

"Didn't you love it, Mr. Brewer?" she asked eagerly. "Didn't you think it was the most wonderful thing that ever could be?"

Mr. Brewer grunted something, but Williamina

could not hear what. She only caught the tone, and she thought it sounded worried and unhappy.

"What is it?" she asked softly. "Is your nephew on your mind? Haven't you found him yet?"

No, Mr. Brewer hadn't found his nephew, he hadn't heard a word from him he told William, over Williamina's head, it was just as if the earth had opened and swallowed the only nephew Mr. Brewer had.

"Young idiot!" he muttered angrily. "Maybe I did write that I might go fishing, but I said he could make himself at home with Hoskins. That wasn't any reason why he should go and hide himself, was it? There couldn't anything have happened to him, could there?" His eyes watched William's face anxiously as he waited for William's tongue to tell him that nothing could have happened to his only nephew. "Young idiot," he murmured again, helplessly this time.

Williamina felt sorry for him. She wanted to help him but she did not see how she could. "What's your only nephew's name?" she asked. "You never told us what his name is."

He looked at her scornfully. What difference did it make what his nephew's name was when he couldn't find his nephew?

"His name is George," he said crossly, "George

Brown. The George is for me," he added in case anyone cared to know.

Williamina stood still in the midst of the crowd which surged around her, and fast as chain lightning her thoughts flew twelve miles away.

"The man at Mr. Knox's cottage has the name of Brown, too!" she cried breathlessly. "Wouldn't it be funny if he should be your only nephew?"

CHAPTER XVIII

IT seemed too ridiculous to be true that the nephew Mr. Brewer had lost could be under the care of Nurse Butters at old Mr. Knox's cottage, not a mile from Mr. Brewer's own home. No wonder Mr. Brewer glared at Williamina and exclaimed "Nonsense!" three times in a very angry and disgusted voice before he added something even more sarcastic about feminine minds.

"My word!" William was neither angry nor disgusted but all admiring commendation as he looked down at pink Williamina. "I wonder if Bobby can be your nephew. If you would listen to us occasionally, Mr. Brewer," he went on with a laugh, when Mr. Brewer only snorted, "you might hear something to your advantage. But every time we have mentioned the cottage you have scowled and vowed that you didn't want to hear anything about women or gossip, so we stopped telling you the neighborhood news."

"But I've found your nephew for you now," Williamina was jubilant and important. "I'm

sure I have!" as Mr. Brewer snorted again. "I feel it in my bones that our Mr. Brown is your George Brown. His name is George, too, George Robert. He told me so himself. Once he was always called George, but there were three George Browns in his class at school so he changed to Robert, and since then he has generally been Robert. You ask him!" You might have thought that Bobby Brown was waiting just outside the tent to be asked. "Oh, Miss Helen! Marietta!" she called to them. "Did you hear our good news? Mr. Brewer lost his only nephew, you know, and I've just found him at your house!"

"Our house!" Helen and Marietta were as surprised as she could wish. They did not know there was anyone at their house but Nurse Butters and Bobby Brown. Nurse Butters could not be anyone's lost nephew, and Bobby Brown—but, if Bobby Brown was Mr. Brewer's missing relative, why hadn't he said he had friends in the neighborhood weeks before? Williamina could not tell them that, although she made a brave attempt at an explanation. Mr. Brewer turned away impatiently with a muttered reference to women which nobody understood and which nobody asked to have repeated.

"If this idiotic story is true and this man is my nephew," Mr. Brewer said to Dr. Grey, "mind

you, I don't say he is—how soon can he be moved? I can't leave him up there with a pack of women another day."

Dr. Grey knew Mr. Brewer very well. He had taken care of him through an attack of sciatica of such intensity that all characteristics were bared. "You may move him as soon as you please as long as you move his nurse with him," he was kind enough to say.

Mr. Brewer's face had brightened at the first few words, but gloom returned when the doctor added the last few to his sentence. "His nurse!" he snapped. "I'll not have a woman nurse in my house!"

"Then Brown remains where he is. He can't get along without a nurse yet." The doctor was adamant.

"Don't you like Nurse Butters?" Williamina was surprised. She hesitated as to whether she should confide her secret concerning Nurse Butters, but as Mr. Brewer's face grew darker she decided that she had better not. He was in no mood to appreciate the fact that some day Nurse Butters would burst out of her white linen uniform. "That's because you don't know her," she said instead. "She's very pleasant. She's trained and registered, you know, and she's making friends very fast. She'll be able to have a splen-

did funeral when she's ready. She's quite large!" she finished triumphantly, as if her size was Nurse Butters' best qualification, as indeed it was in Williamina's eyes.

But if Mr. Brewer heard her Williamina never knew, for he was frowning blackly at the doctor. "There is such a thing as a man nurse," he reminded him tartly. "You can wire to Waloo for one, can't you?"

"Better see if Brown is your nephew before we wire anywhere," advised William. "This chap may be a perfect stranger. Brown isn't an uncommon name. Neither is George—nor Robert."

"Oh, but he is." Williamina was positive. "My bones tell me, William. Really, they do," she insisted.

Mr. Brewer grumbled some more, a lot more, before he would consent to go to old Mr. Knox's cottage, the abode of despised femininity.

"Won't Mr. Brown be surprised to find I'm bringing him an uncle as well as a balloon?" Williamina smiled radiantly as she waited, a balloon floating from each hand, for William to bring the chicken car around.

Just how it happened no one could tell but Hunter Olney, and he never divulged his business methods, but as the two cars drove away Marietta was with Dr. Grey and Helen was with William

on the front seat of the chicken car. Hunter, on the rear seat, held Williamina firmly in his arms. He was not going to have any more nonsense.

"It's a good thing I'm here," he chuckled to himself as he looked at Helen and William, side by side. "Old Bill's forgotten what he used to know about girls. It doesn't do to let them know when a man's jealous."

He became more convinced than ever that William was jealous and Helen unreasonable, for they scarcely spoke to each other as they rolled over the twelve miles to old Mr. Knox's cottage. It was Williamina who kept the conversational ball in the air, for Mr. Brewer was lost in a brown study, and Hunter was working on the problem he had undertaken to master. It was not his way to give up a tangle until he had untied it, and he would work over this one until he could take Helen's hand in his right hand and William's hand in his left hand and murmur paternally: "Bless you, my children!"

Bobby Brown gave a whoop of delight when Williamina danced out on the porch, her hands behind her, a balloon floating over each shoulder. Bobby had been alone with Nurse Butters and the yellow dog all day and was ready for a change.

"You can't guess what I've brought you!" Williamina cried exultingly.

"You can't guess what I've brought you!" Williamina cried exultingly.

"I can!" Bobby had two eyes in his head, and he could see what she had for him. "You have brought me a green balloon. I chose the green one, first because it is the color of jealousy, and I have been madly jealous of the circus all day; and second, because I know that Nurse Butters' long wished for and eagerly anticipated balloon is red."

"It is!" Nurse Butters was honest, and she took the string of the red balloon in her plump fingers. "As red as they can make them. Maybe it is childish for a woman of my age to want a balloon, but seems if it's better to be satisfied with little things you can have than hanker after limousine automobiles that I don't stand no show of ever getting."

"I brought you something else, Mr. Brown!" Williamina exclaimed, when she had given him the green balloon.

"Generous child." He patted her flushed cheek. "What is it? A bag of peanuts? You surely never brought me a glass of pink lemonade? Not all those miles!"

"No, it isn't a glass of pink lemonade nor peanuts." A wee pucker appeared between Williamina's eyebrows. Perhaps Bobby Brown would rather have lemonade or peanuts. "I've brought you an uncle," she told him dubiously.

Bobby Brown looked at her. For once he

seemed at a loss for words, and his face turned red, away up to his sleek black hair, which ran away from his forehead as if it were afraid of it, and around behind his ears. "An uncle?" he managed to say in a faint voice.

Before Williamina could explain, which her eager tongue was only too anxious to do, the others came trooping out, Mr. Brewer in the rear, as if his reluctance to enter the habitation of women had had to combat and overcome his desire to see if this Bobby Brown was his long-lost George Brown.

"Suffering cats!" murmured Bobby in Williamina's ear. "Hello, Uncle George!" he called, holding out a thin white hand. "When did you get back?"

Mr. Brewer stopped where he was, half way to the sofa where Bobby Brown lay, clad in the dark-blue bathrobe and holding the string of a green balloon which floated above him. In the rocking-chair beside him was the fattest woman Mr. Brewer had even seen, and she held the string of a red balloon. For just a moment Mr. Brewer felt that his mind was tottering. But only for a moment. In sixty seconds he had recalled the comforting fact that Bobby had been ill and his nurse was a woman; anything could be expected of a sick man and a woman, but the emotion of that

moment made his voice a feeble moan instead of the usual loud roar.

"Back!" he said. "What makes you think I've been away?"

"Your own hand." Bobby's voice was not feeble. It was confident and curious. "You wrote me you were going fishing, but I could have your house if I drifted this way. So when Fate threw me into this very pleasant and hospitable place I thought I might as well stay. I didn't suppose you were within a hundred miles of me. And I didn't speak of you for fear some of our mutual friends would write and spoil your trip."

It was Mr. Brewer's turn to blush then, and he did it with what must have been painful thoroughness. His backbone seemed to have been completely removed from his sturdy figure, and he clutched the back of a chair for support. He had not expected his letter to be taken so literally, but as he remembered its contents he had to swallow the reproaches with which he had been prepared to meet his only nephew.

"Well," he said, with such a total lack of fire that William and Williamina had to look twice to make sure that he was their Mr. Brewer, "I'm home now, and we'll move you right down. Hoskins and I'll take care of you."

"I can't be moved yet!" Bobby clutched the

eagerly. "I know which I should like to have marry me, but which one do you think will do it, Uncle George?"

Mr. Brewer looked down at the laughing face with the twinkling eyes. There was not a hint of a laugh about his frowning eyes or sneering mouth. "Damn young fool!" he said in disgust, and as Nurse Butters left the rocking chair beside the sofa he slipped into it and looked about defiantly to let them see that he would protect his only nephew from all feminine wiles.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Helen ran away to take off her hat she looked at the reflection in her mirror and sniffed. "What a silly I've been!" she murmured as she took down her hair and did it over again in the old way, which would make her look five years younger than she had looked for the past weeks. She flushed guiltily as she saw Marietta's twinkling face beside hers in the mirror.

"It's a long way from Mifflin," Marietta yawned. Then she saw that Helen had mysteriously robbed herself of five years and looked at her oddly. "I like your hair that way," she said after a second's careful scrutiny. "Why did you ever change?" Fortunately she did not wait for Helen to answer, but went on happily: "That doctor of Bobby Brown's is not so hopelessly archaic as I thought. We had a right good chat on suffrage. What did you talk about?"

"Why—why," began Helen, furious because she knew that a red wave had flooded her face,

"we talked of—of housing," she finished triumphantly and truthfully.

"You did?" Marietta was doubtful. "Much you know of any housing conditions," she scoffed. "Well, the lost has been found; our mysterious invalid is proved to be the missing nephew of peppery Mr. Brewer. There has been a battle royal between the doctor and Mr. Brewer. He's going to stay for supper," she added carelessly.

"Mr. Brewer's going to stay for supper!" Helen forgot to be self-conscious and rosy. "He'll choke! He can never sit at the table with three women without choking."

"I didn't say Mr. Brewer was going to stay, goose." Marietta slipped her hand under Helen's arm. "I said the doctor was going to stay."

"You never," was on the tip of Helen's tongue, but she kept the words there and said lamely, "Oh, is he?"

Marietta took charge of the supper and suggested that William and Williamina should go to Wayside Farm in the chicken car and see if Mrs. Macartney could let them have some chickens to fry. William and Williamina found that Mrs. Macartney had chickens already fried as well as a toothsome combination of potatoes and carrots and green peppers and cream sauce and cheese, with a salad, and hot biscuits, and a freezer of

ice cream, and one of her delicious chocolate cakes. Williamina squealed when she saw the array of good things. It seemed magic for Mrs. Macartney to be so well prepared when no one had known until ten minutes ago that chickens were wanted even for frying. She regarded Mrs. Macartney with the awe due the worker of such charms. But Mrs. Macartney only laughed and told Jacob to help William pack the baskets in the chicken car.

"I knew you would come home hungry," she explained to William. "And at first I was going to ask you all up here for supper, but that would leave Mr. Brown and Nurse Butters alone, and they have been alone all day. The potatoes and biscuits will keep warm, and we can make the coffee in a minute."

An added festivity was given the affair by bringing old Mr. Knox's table out on the porch and putting every extra leaf into it. When Mrs. Macartney and her biscuits, heralded by the puzzled and appreciative Williamina, arrived, there was general jubilation.

"If I had my way, Mrs. Macartney, you should be crowned," Bobby told her smilingly, while Helen and Marietta hugged her until she cried for mercy.

"I'd rather have a cousin than any other rela-

tion in the world!" Marietta cried gratefully. Marietta liked to offer invitations far more than she liked to prepare for guests.

"Oh, I don't know," whispered Bobby with a sly glance at the relation in the rocking chair beside him, who looked anything but happy, although his mind should have been at rest in regard to the whereabouts of his only nephew. "An uncle is something very choice."

It was after supper that Hunter Olney announced that he must return to Waloo on the first train in the morning. He had seen William and Helen side by side at supper, had heard William offer her fried chicken and Helen offer William salad, and he had decided that they had made their peace and could be safely left for a few days. The jealous storm was evidently over, and after a shower he had observed that the sun always shone brighter.

"Why must you go?" demanded Marietta. "We need you here more than anyone does in Waloo. We never should have had such a stunning circus party without you. Why must you go?" Her brown eyes begged him to tell her why as well as her red lips.

Bobby looked at her in surprise. Surely she didn't care whether an old fellow like Olney

stayed or went. A big V appeared between his eyebrows as he looked at her.

"I know why he has to go," Williamina was proud to tell them. "He wants to find me a mother. No, I didn't listen, William, dear!" she said quickly as he muttered something. "But you talked right under my window and so I had to hear. Mr. Olney might just as well stay with Marietta, for I don't want a mother. I don't want anyone but my William!" She put her hand under her William's arm and squeezed it jealously.

"That's because you don't know what it is to have a mother." Hunter was not at all pleased to have his plans made public. He had expected to disappear quietly and return with Williamina's mother under his arm. He looked at Mrs. Macartney for help. Surely she would understand and could make Williamina see that she would like a mother if she once had one. Why, all youngsters liked their mothers. But Mrs. Macartney refused to see his appealing look. She knew better than to talk of mothers to Williamina.

"Yes, I do!" Williamina cried indignantly. "That is, I've read about lots of mothers, and I wouldn't trade my William for a hundred of them. Not for a thousand!" She jumped up and ran to stand in front of Hunter. "You may find

me all the mothers you want to, all of you, but I shan't take one of them. I don't have to, do I, William? I don't have to take what I don't want just because I give! Do I?" She ran back to William and bent down to whisper in his ear.

Poor William! He wished with all of his heart that a tidal wave would rush up the river from the Gulf of Mexico and drown them all, all these friendly busybodies; but as that could not happen, he made the best of the situation and whispered to Williamina that she was not to bother, that Hunter would never find her mother, that he didn't believe anyone in the whole world would ever find her real mother.

"That's because I'm a fairy child." Williamina looked around the little circle tremulously triumphant. "Nobody knows where I came from nor why, so I must be a fairy child."

No one contradicted her, no one quite dared, and so Hunter Olney was allowed to swing the conversation to another angle of the same subject.

"What I want to do," he said in a way that told them that what he wanted to do he did, "is to take old Bill with me. He hasn't any business loafing here on a river bank."

"He hasn't any business in Waloo," muttered William, rising to his feet. He wouldn't stay to argue with people who could only see one side

of a question. "If you will excuse me, good people," he tried to smile on them in the old friendly way, "I'll take the fairy child home. She has had quite a large day."

"But I'm not a bit sleepy," objected Williamina. "And I want to know why we haven't any business in Waloo? I've never been in Waloo."

"We'll talk about it on the way," William promised. And then he said good night to Helen and Marietta and Nurse Butters, who still held the string of her red balloon, and to Mr. Brewer, who looked as if he meant to sit in that rocking chair forever.

Williamina had to say her good nights, too, and when Mr. Brewer realized that their departure would leave him alone with three women, for Bobby, being incapacitated, didn't count, Mr. Brewer rose to his feet.

"Take my word for it," he bent over his nephew, "one of them will surely marry you if you stay here."

"Which?" asked Bobby in as tantalizing a whisper as he had asked the question before. "Will it be the one I want to marry? Or the other one? I have to stay, Uncle George, to see which will do it. Good night," he called with a chuckle as his uncle turned away with an indignant grunt.

Mr. Brewer muttered the curtest of farewells to Helen and Marietta, and as he watched them the grin died from Bobby's lips. How pretty Helen was as she stood smiling at his unreasonable relative! And Marietta! What an alluring witch she was. By thunder, his uncle should be pleased if either of these girls would deign to look at him. He wasn't so sure himself that the one he wanted to have look at him would ever glance in his direction twice. He was so very doubtful that he groaned. Nurse Butters rose and came to him, the red balloon floating above her head.

"It's time you were in bed," she said sternly. "You've had a good deal of excitement for an invalid."

William and Hunter walked from the Knox house through the pine grove, and William carried Williamina curled in his arms. All the way Hunter talked of how much he wanted William with him in Waloo and how much William should want to be in Waloo with him.

"I can't afford to live in Waloo," William told him impatiently. "I haven't much money and I can't earn any, and anyway I like it here."

"Can't earn any!" Hunter could not believe that any man would ever tell him that he couldn't earn money. "That comes well from the brightest fellow in our class," he jeered. "I'll give you

a job myself that'll pay you good money," he offered generously.

"I can't take money from you," William told him almost fiercely. "And as for earning—you forget that I've been out of the world for almost twenty years. I've forgotten what the word business means. I'd be as helpless as Williamina here."

Williamina half asleep in his arms raised her head indignantly. "I'm not helpless," she murmured, "I've got my big wish to spend."

"So you have, honey." William's cheek rested against hers. "And a kiddie couldn't have anything better. You see how it is, Hunt? Why don't you leave us alone? Bill and I are satisfied and happy here."

"You haven't any business to be satisfied nor happy," Hunt exclaimed indignantly. "Great Scott! What kind of a life is it for a man with any red blood in his veins? And you used to be a live wire, Bill. You haven't forgotten, you can't have forgotten, the old days when you were fairly eaten up with ambition. No man should be buried until he's dead. You've got to come back. You're needed out there." He pointed in the direction of Waloo to show William where he was needed. "That's gospel true. I can't see why you should want to stay here,

but even if you do, why a man can't do as he pleases. He's under an obligation to more than himself, to his country, his family, his community. If you haven't kept your ears and eyes shut, you know the time is mighty close when every man in the country will have to recognize his obligation to his country. You wouldn't be satisfied to stay here. No, you wouldn't! Let me finish," dictatorily as William tried to interrupt. "You've got to come back because the country needs you. And I need you. No one has ever taken your place with me. And what about your obligation to Williamina? I don't say you can keep her, but if you do, you can't give her what she should have in this lonely hole. It will be all right for a couple of weeks in the summer, maybe. You never used to shirk your duty, Bill, and I don't believe you are going to do it now. But, pshaw! Why am I talking that way? You're coming back. I say it, and when old Hunt Olney speaks, the thing is as good as done," he announced in his most royal manner.

William made a noble effort and kept his mouth shut. He just stalked along, with Williamina in his arms and let Hunter talk. As they went up the steps of the shack Hunter slapped William on the back and cried exultingly:

"I've got it, Bill! I've got it!"

"Got what?" asked William wearily, and even Williamina opened her eyes and ears to hear what Hunter had.

"You say you won't take money or a job from me," Hunter said quickly. "Well, I've thought of a way you can make money for yourself, slathers of it. I knew I would if I just put my mind to it. Remember that toy I picked up that first night I was here? Well, you get a patent on it. There's a fortune in it. Yes, there is! I know. Lord, there's always money in a clever novelty. I'd like twenty-five or fifty thousand of the things myself to give away with my breakfast food. For the kids, you know, an advertisement. I've been looking for something of the kind. Honest, I have. You ask my advertising man. And this was clever, damned clever. The kids'll be crazy about them. They're better than those old Teddy bears that were such a rage. The first thing in the morning you hunt up this old Sniglefritz—was that his name?—and make a deal with him. I'd better go with you to see you don't cheat yourself. And I'll let you have the money—at six per cent," hastily, as William's mouth opened to remind him that he would not take money from him, "to put up a factory. I'll give you a first order of fifty thousand. Why, in a year you won't

be able to count your money!" He slapped William on the back again.

"Won't he?" William had put Williamina on her feet in the big living room, and she had run to find her Sniglefritz. "Won't he be able to count it if I help him? I expect I can count to a million."

"You'll have to," Hunter pleasantly prophesied, "if you count what he will make. But first we must get hold of old Sniglefritz. Better not wait until morning, Bill. You cut to bed," he said to Williamina, "and Bill and I'll hunt up old Sniglefritz now." It was not Hunter Olney's way to dally over a project. He never would have been a breakfast-food king if it had been. "Where does he live?" he demanded in his quick direct manner.

Williamina laughed gleefully. "I'll take you to old Sniglefritz. May I, William, dear?" And when William nodded she slipped her hand in Hunter's hand and led him forward until he stood beside William. "Here's old Fritz Sniglefritz, Mr. Olney," she said with a giggle. It was so funny that Mr. Olney did not know.

Hunter stared at William. "Do you mean to tell me that you made this toy, Bill?" he asked, looking from the Sniglefritz in his hand to William.

William laughed a bit shamefacedly. "Well," he confessed, "Bill and I made it together, didn't we, Bill?"

"I thought of it, and William made it," she explained, jumping up and down. "We each helped the other. We're partners," she announced proudly.

"You are!" Hunter looked from one partner to the other before he laughed. He eyed the Sniglefritz again. "Say," he said suddenly, "where did you get these colors?" For he had discovered in that quick, searching glance that he had never seen the exact shades he found in the toy William and Williamina had made.

"We made them," Williamina proudly told him. "I guess there isn't much we can't make," she boasted.

"You did?" Hunter looked at William, and when William nodded, he said, as if he couldn't believe it even then: "Well, I'll be darned! Made them yourself? Out of dyes you bought? Or from the beginning?"

"From the beginning," William said, and with Williamina's help Hunter was told how Williamina had cried for colored Easter eggs. In making them for her William had become interested in his old experiments and had worked out this

new color scheme, "William's rainbow," Williamina had called it.

"Well, I'll be darned!" Hunter said again, as if he could not believe it even yet. "You old Bill, you! Don't you know this country is crying for dyes ever since the supply from Germany was shut off? What do you mean by keeping this discovery to yourself? There's a fortune in it!"

"More than in Sniglefritz?" asked Williamina jealously.

"I should say there was!" Hunter was still dazed. "Why, Bill, I can hardly believe it!" And he looked at William as if William had suddenly grown six extra feet in height and embellished himself with whiskers that swept the floor. "And you would have kept this discovery from the world when the world needs it?" he asked slowly. He could not believe that any man would keep anything which was worth a fortune from a needy world. "It's a lucky thing I fell asleep in that old rowboat. Tell me all about it," he begged.

CHAPTER XX

HUNTER OLNEY did not leave for Waloo on the first train the next morning. He sat up so late with William, talking of the enormous sums which could be made from the manufacture and sale of "rainbows" and Sniglefritzes that he overslept and did not come down for breakfast until long after the first train had gone snorting on its way.

"It's lucky there's another train," he said as he buttered the toast Louis made for him. "I must be in Waloo this afternoon."

"Why?" asked the ever curious Williamina, as she poured his coffee. "Why must you be in Waloo this afternoon?"

"To make arrangements for the manufacture of Sniglefritzes so that you and William can come tomorrow."

"O-oh!" Williamina put down the coffee pot to clap her hands. "Oh, William, shall we really go tomorrow?" Every dimple in her face told William how ready she was to go on the morrow.

William shook his head. "I don't think we

can manage that. Wouldn't you be happy here just with me, Bill?" he asked wistfully. "Do you really want to go to Waloo to live?" He hoped she would say that she didn't, but Williamina had been brought up to tell the truth.

"Yes, William, I do! I don't suppose I ever should want to go if I hadn't found Mr. Olney in the bulrushes, and if I hadn't found Mr. Brown wrapped around the tree trunk, and if I hadn't found Miss Helen crying on the steps of old Mr. Knox's house. But you see they've all told me what a wonderful place Waloo is until it seems as if I must see it before I die. And you can't ever tell when you are going to die, William, dear, so perhaps we'd better go tomorrow." And Williamina nodded her yellow head until her hair bows bobbed wildly and her cheeks were as red as the poppies Louis had put in the center of the table.

William smiled when she told how she had found Hunter Olney and Bobby Brown and Helen Spafford, but he frowned when she explained that they had made Waloo a wonderful city which drew her like a magnet until she could not be happy again until she had seen it.

"Are you sure that's the only reason, Bill?" he asked as an unpleasant thought darted through his mind.

Williamina looked at him. What other reason could she have. Hunter told her:

"Perhaps it's because there's a mother waiting for you in Waloo that you want to go there," he smiled, as if he could not suggest anything that Williamina would rather have.

"Was that what you meant, William?" she asked before she answered Hunter. "Oh, I hope not! I mean it's very kind of you to want to give me something, Mr. Olney, but I couldn't take a mother. I don't want one, you know. I have William. I don't believe I want to go to Waloo if I have to find a mother there." And she leaned across the table to find William's hand and squeeze it.

"Can't you leave us alone, Hunt!" William was ashamed of the thought that had darted through his mind and spoke impatiently, as he squeezed her fingers. "Bill and I are satisfied as we are. Leave us alone."

Hunter looked at him in amazement. Leave a piece of work half finished! That was not the way the Lord had made him, thank God! and having started to find a mother for Williamina he would have to keep on until he had a mother. So he shook his head at William. "There's another side, my dear fellow, that you are forgetting,

the side of Williamina's mother. You must think of her," he said gently.

"Why must he?" demanded Williamina, who spent little time thinking of her own mother unless some one like Hunter made her.

"Because he's an honest, big-hearted gentleman," Hunter told her so solemnly that she blinked. "I've got to follow this up, Bill. It's my duty, and I'm not the man to shirk a plain duty. I'll let you know at once what I learn, and it will be all for the best I promise you," he smiled.

"I should think you would have business enough of your own to keep you from meddling in other people's business," muttered William, giving him a frown instead of a smile.

"I can always put my own business aside to help a friend," Hunter told him with royal dignity. "Now, how am I to get to Mifflin?"

Marietta took him to town in Nurse Butters' little car.

"I'm glad to loan it to you," Nurse Butters said generously. "But that don't mean I want you to run it into a ditch and smash it to bits. I don't drive over fifteen miles an hour myself, as I've told you, and I expect anyone who borrows my car to do as I do. Maybe they won't," she prophesied darkly, "but I like to think folks are

white until I've seen their yellow streak with my own eyes."

"A yellow streak!" Williamina's eyes popped wide open. "I never saw anybody with a yellow streak, Nurse Butters. I've seen white people and black people and brown people and one man, the Chinese laundryman in Mifflin, who was all yellow, but I never saw anyone with a yellow streak. Did you, Nurse Butters?"

"I have." The solemnity in Nurse Butters' voice and manner left no doubt. "More than one with a broad yellow streak right down their backs. Maybe they think it was hid but you can't hide a yellow streak forever, somebody's bound to see it. There ain't anything you can hide, Williamina, for all time. You take my word for it."

"Such words of wisdom!" Marietta made big eyes at big-eyed Williamina and patted Nurse Butters' broad shoulders with a friendly hand. "And that car, Nurse Butters, needs to go faster than fifteen miles an hour occasionally to keep it ahead of the rust. Want to go in with us, honey?"

Of course Williamina wanted to go, and all the way Hunter, aided and abetted by Marietta, talked of the wonders of Waloo until Williamina was dizzy with the desire to see for herself buildings whose feet were deep, deep in the ground

and whose roofs towered to the clouds so that you had to ride from the cellars to the attics in cunning little carriages; the huge parks like a king's garden with silver lakes and white swans and in one a zoo far better than that of any circus, for the animals lived outdoors and not caged in tents; the great shops crammed with toys from every country.

"But they haven't any Sniglefritz!" Williamina interrupted jealously.

"No Sniglefritz yet," Hunter had to admit before he described a candy shop that made Williamina wonder if there really could be such a place.

By the time Mifflin was reached Williamina was quite convinced that she and William must go to Waloo by the morrow at the latest; neither of them could afford to wait another minute. Hunter entertained Marietta and Williamina at luncheon at the Mifflin House and told Williamina that when she came to Waloo he would take her to lunch in a café which was like the hold of a pirate ship with portholes for windows and huge lanterns for lights. Just as he stepped on the train he remembered a shop where animals of every kind, birds that could talk, dogs that could dance and monkeys that could take your hand and walk with you, were actually for sale. And Wil-

liamina, who had never heard of animals for sale, was speechless.

"Well," Hunter told himself, as he waved good-by from the observation platform of the Chicago Flyer, "I think I've given that kid a taste for Waloo that will last until I come again. I've made a shining Bagdad out of the dingy old town. She won't be satisfied to stay on any river bank now. I'll turn her over to her mother, and then I'll get old Bill back with me and everything will be as it should be. What the devil—" he put his hand in his pocket which was behaving as a pocket of his had never behaved before and drew out a small white rabbit. "Well, I'll be darned!" he exclaimed. "That kid must have dropped it there."

He held the rabbit over the platform rail and then the frown on his face changed to a grin. "What a kid she is with her giving and her getting. You bet I'll find a mother for her! Here, George," to the porter, who hovered near, "Here's a present for you." He dropped the rabbit into the black hand and put his fingers into his pocket again. "And here's a little board money for him," handing the man a bill. "Take him home to your kids," he said in his most royal manner. "I don't want anything to happen to him."

"No, sah, nothin' shall," grinned George, who had seen the figure in a corner of the bill, and it was large enough to board a white rabbit for a year or more. "I got a little gal who'll jump outen her skin when she sees him, sah. Thankye, sah."

Williamina was still in a daze as she stood on the station platform and waved one hand at the train which flew away from her along the shining track. In the other hand she clutched the crisp one dollar bill which Hunter had given her to spend as she pleased.

"What are you going to buy?" Marietta asked as she drove Nurse Butters' car up the street fast enough to keep it well ahead of the rust.

"I don't know." Williamina looked at her gift. Never in all of her ten years had she had such wealth to spend. "I might buy William a golden harp or something," she said vaguely, still seeing visions of a bright and shining city called Waloo.

"Perhaps you'll find something here," Marietta suggested as she stopped before the book, drug and toy shop which in Mifflin were all in one.

Williamina didn't think she would but she changed her mind when she saw a new fairy book on the table. The pictures called to her loudly: "Come buy me, Williamina! Come buy me!"

Williamina could not refuse the call of those fascinating pictures.

"I want this," she said at once.

"But won't that take all of your money?" objected Marietta. "Perhaps you haven't enough."

Williamina clutched the red and gold volume, but she smiled contentedly at the salesman. As if there was anything in the world that a dollar, one hundred whole cents, would not buy. She was not at all surprised when she was told that the price of the book was only ninety-eight cents. She had known her dollar would buy it ever since she had heard the pictures call: "Come buy me, Williamina! Come buy me!"

"That leaves you with only two cents to buy your present for your beloved William," Marietta reminded her. "I don't know what you can get but a postage stamp; a nice steel engraving of old George Washington."

"William wouldn't care for a postage stamp, and we have one picture of George Washington," Williamina answered quickly. "But he'd love this book, and he'd lend it to me so it would be just the same as having it for my own. I'll buy the book and two sticks of crayon, a red stick and a blue stick, like the stripes in our flag," she told the salesman. "My," she sighed when the flag stripes had been matched and she had her pack-

ages in her hand, "money is a great care, isn't it? I don't think I ever want any more."

When they left the shop they met Dr. Grey.

"Good morning, Dr. Grey," called Williamina. "How are you after the circus? Did you dream of monkeys? I never did."

Dr. Grey never told her what he had dreamed of. He looked at Marietta in an odd sort of a way as if he were really seeing some one else.

"Will you tell Miss Spafford that I'm coming out as soon as I can?" He stuttered a bit as he asked the favor.

"Bobby Brown, you mean," corrected Marietta, who knew very well the name of the doctor's patient at old Mr. Knox's cottage, and it was not Helen Spafford.

"I said Miss Spafford," the doctor insisted, and the dull red that crept into his face crept into his frown also.

Marietta regarded him from under her long lashes. "Oh, very well," she answered demurely. "Goodby." As she turned the car toward home she sighed. "The operation was successful," she said ruefully, "The doctor has carefully removed any idea I might have had that he preferred me. And my temperature is normal, Williamina, absolutely normal!"

"What's normal?" asked the ever curious Williamina.

"To find that you don't care for people who don't care for you," Marietta told her promptly. "And believe me, Williamina, it's a very satisfactory condition to be in."

As soon as she had seen her car off for town Nurse Butters moved her patient to the porch but instead of thanking his kind nurse for giving him all out of doors in exchange for one dingy room Bobby frowned. There was no one on the porch, and who cares for all out of doors if there is no one to share it with you?

"Where's Miss Spafford?" he asked fretfully. There was no doubt that Bobby Brown had become somewhat spoiled. "What's she doing?"

"She's shelling peas in the kitchen." Nurse Butters bent to tuck the light wrap about his shoulders for a cool little breeze blew up from the river to ruffle his hair. "Maybe you ain't rampagin' around on your own two feet," she went on pleasantly, "but then you ain't strapped to a board, either, with all your legs and arms in plaster." She stood off and beamed at him, she was so glad that he was not incased in plaster.

Bobby moved restlessly. What was interested him far more than what might be. "Tell Miss Spafford to bring her work out here," he said,

feeling that in her present optimistic mood Nurse Butters' undivided attention was more than he could bear. "I'll help her. We can't expect her to do all the work."

As if she had heard him Helen came out with the peas, which an hour before had been growing in Mrs. Macartney's garden. "It just occurred to me that I could shell peas here as well as in the kitchen," she said. "And it's a lot pleasanter here."

"Exactly what Nurse Butters and I were saying," grinned Bobby. "We're going to help you. I feel as if I could eat a peck of peas myself, and I haven't any right to ask any girl to shell that many for me without doing something for her, so if you'll shell for me I'll shell for you."

"That sounds like a real man's bargain," chuckled Nurse Butters, as she took a generous handful of green pods from the pan beside Helen, "offering to shell a spoonful for a peck."

"Nurse Butters, you cast aspersions on my sex," objected Bobby.

"That's as may be," Nurse Butters broke the pods and shelled them with automatic regularity. "Maybe it was an aspersion, I dunno much about them, but I've noticed that most folks don't put on a shoe that won't fit them."

Mr. Brewer found the three pleasantly em-

ployed when he came out a few moments later to make sure that his only nephew had not been married since the night before. He groaned when he saw Bobby engaged in such a domestic task as shelling peas.

"Come and lend a hand, Uncle George," Bobby called. "You'll enjoy your dinner more if you earn it first."

"That isn't my dinner," Mr. Brewer grunted after a cold good morning to Helen and Nurse Butters which could not fail to tell them that in his eyes they were of less value than the discarded pea pods. "And it wouldn't be yours if you would pay some attention to my wishes and come home with me."

"Sorry," Bobby looked anything but sorry. "Doctor's orders forbid, you know."

"Doctor's fiddlesticks! If you can be moved out here you can be moved a little farther."

"That ain't always true, Mr. Brewer." Nurse Butters snapped a pod as she spoke and two of the peas flew out and hit Mr. Brewer in the face. "You can put a pint of water in a pint cup, but you can't crowd in a quart no matter how hard you try."

Bobbie gazed admiringly at his nurse. "There's truth for you, Uncle George. I don't

know anyone who can put a thing as plain and as much to the point as my good nurse."

Mr. Brewer snorted as if he didn't care whether it was truth that was being offered to him or not, but he took the chair beside his only nephew. And his only nephew winked at Helen.

"Where's Olney?" asked Mr. Brewer suddenly.

"He's gone back to Waloo," Bobby told him cheerfully. "And I'm glad of it. A man like him is a menace. It's against the law to work twenty-four hours a day. A poor man isn't allowed to do it," he frowned. "Olney should be locked up or fined for being continually on the job. He came down to this peaceful Eden and handed around the apples——"

"Apples!" interrupted Mr. Brewer scornfully. "It's breakfast food Olney makes."

"It's apples he handed out here," insisted Bobby. "Wily old serpent. You wait, and you'll see I'm right when the exodus from the garden begins."

"Who's going to leave?" Mr. Brewer asked eagerly and dared to look at Helen. Perhaps she was. He hoped so. Her profile was turned toward him, and he found it so charming that he kept his eyes on it for several seconds before he realized that he was staring at a woman, when

he hurriedly shifted his gaze to a harmless bridal wreath which grew beside the steps.

"Kirwin and Williamina."

Mr. Brewer grew more scornful. "Olney won't find moving William Kirwin as easy as making breakfast mush out of chicken feed. William's a fixture here, has been for almost twenty years."

"There is great motive power in an apple," Bobby explained. "And you must not forget that Williamina has eaten one, a very juicy, red-cheeked apple."

"There it is!" Mr. Brewer groaned. "It's the women who upset a man's life every time!"

"And who has a better right, Mr. Brewer?" Nurse Butters regarded him sternly, and her voice boomed so deep and round that Mr. Brewer jumped. "Where would a man be if it wasn't for some woman? Just tell me that, sir?" She rose and stood towering above him, so scornful that he dared not look up at her.

He could not tell her, and with a sniff she went in for her patient's eggnog.

"Better look out, Uncle George," Bobby whispered anxiously. "She'll marry you before you can say 'Jack Robinson.'"

Mr. Brewer recoiled in horror. "My God!" he muttered rising involuntarily from his chair.

"My God!" he said again and jumped quite out of his chair. "I think I'll go down and see William," he went on hurriedly. "And if you have as much sense as the Lord gave geese you'll let me take you away at once."

"Poor old chap!" Bobby looked after him pityingly as he hurried down to William.

"Why poor?" asked Helen snapping the last pod. "I understand that Mr. Brewer can do what he pleases and have what he pleases. Why do you call him poor?"

"Does having and doing mean happiness to you?" He was surprised; he had not thought she was that kind of a girl.

"It does!" She confessed it frankly. "It would to you, too, if you had never done or had in all your life."

He shook his head. He knew it wouldn't. "Do all girls think that? Does—Miss White?" He hesitated and flushed as he asked what Marietta thought.

Helen looked up quickly. Since his accident Bobby's face was usually as white as paper. No wonder Helen stared when she saw it turned to a tomato red.

"I don't know," she said honestly as she looked at him with curious eyes. "We haven't discussed it, but I fancy she is like most girls——"

"No, she isn't!" Bobby interrupted involuntarily. "She isn't like any girl I ever met! I mean," he stammered as he became aware of Helen's questioning eyes, "that most of the girls I know have black or yellow hair. Miss Marietta's hair is red."

CHAPTER XXI

HERE am I!" Williamina ran up the steps to find William lounging in a big chair on the porch, but instead of being absorbed in a book, as usual, he was looking off over the river and the expression of his face told even Williamina that his thoughts were not the thoughts he wanted. "What is it, William, dear?" She slipped her arm around his neck. "What have you in your mind to make your face so sad?"

When William looked up into her eyes there was no sadness in his face, only a great tenderness. "Hello, Bill, back again?" he said. "Did you have a good time?"

"Good time!" How could she tell him what a good time she had had? "See what I brought you, William!" And she put the book on his knee and tore off the wrapping. "At first I was going to buy you a necktie like the blue one Mr. Olney wore, but Marietta said it wasn't safe for a woman to buy a man's neckties; she said so three times. And then I was going to buy you a golden harp because you said one day you believed you

could play a golden harp if you had one, and then I saw this beautiful book, and I knew right away it was what I would bring you. Mr. Olney gave me a whole dollar to spend for myself," she announced proudly.

William was properly impressed. "A whole dollar! Not a hundred cents?" incredulously, and when she nodded that it was as much as a hundred cents, he asked: "And what did you buy for yourself?"

"These penny crayons. I've wanted a red one and a blue one, the color of the stripes in our flag, for a long time. They were two cents, and the book was ninety-eight cents. It was a bargain at that, the man in the store told us. What do you think, William? Do you think it was a bargain at ninety-eight cents?" She was so anxious that he should think it was a bargain that her forehead puckered.

William took her and the bargain in his arms. "It was a bargain for you, honey, but it's a priceless gift to me. To think that you spent all of your money on me!" He was quite touched.

"Not all of it." Williamina was nothing if not literal. "Only part of it. And I thought you'd lend me the book, William, dear, if I always washed my hands first?"

"We'll read it together," promised William. "Then Mr. Olney got the train all right?"

"Yes, it carried him right out of our sight. I put that new little white rabbit in his coat pocket. He said he lived alone and the bunny lived alone, so I thought they might be company for each other. The bunny will be another friend for us in Waloo," she told him with a radiant smile.

"You don't want to go to Waloo, Bill," William said after he had chuckled to think what Hunter Olney must have said when he found the company Williamina had slipped into his pocket.

"Oh, but I do!" Williamina was positive. "It's my second best wish, William. Just listen!" And she told him about the tall buildings with their feet deep in the earth and their heads high in the clouds, and the little carriages which carried people up and down, and of the parks like kings' gardens, and the shops full of every toy in the world but the Sniglefritz.

"And the Sniglefritz will be there soon," she finished jubilantly. "Mr. Olney said so."

"But did he tell you how noisy and dirty a big city is?" asked William soberly. "Did he say that all the demons of noise live in the Waloo streets? Instead of the song of the birds and the murmur of the river—beautiful sounds, Bill—you would have to listen to the clang of cars, the shriek of

motors and the rumble of trucks. Your ears wouldn't like those demons, Bill."

No, Mr. Olney had never mentioned any demons, but Williamina did not think her ears would mind—at least not much—and she had never heard the clang of cars, the shriek of motors nor the rumble of trucks. Her ears had listened to the song of birds and the murmur of the river for ten years, and now she was sure they would like to hear the song of a city like Waloo.

"Couldn't we go for a while, William?" she suggested artfully. "And then if our ears didn't like it we could come home."

"Ears! Ears!" growled a harsh voice at the foot of the steps, and there was Mr. Brewer in his rumpled white clothes. "Women are all ears and tongues. No matter how young they are, they hear more and say more than any son of Adam. William," he said angrily, "I'm going to leave. I'm being driven from my peaceful home. I can't stay here another day and see the only nephew I have make a confounded fool of himself. He won't come with me, and if he stays there another twenty-four hours, one of those girls will marry him."

"Which one?" Williamina was all aglow with curiosity. "Which one will marry your only nephew, Mr. Brewer?"

"I don't know!" he snapped. He was almost at the end of his patience. "One's as bad as the other. Both women! What a man wants of a wife when he's free and independent is beyond me! I've talked to him until I'm black in the face. I've a mind to get out a writ of habeas corpus, or whatever it is, and take him home in spite of that idiot doctor and fat old nurse. If a man can't or won't protect himself, it's the duty of his relatives to look after him."

"I doubt if you could get a writ of habeas corpus," grinned William. "Sit down, Mr. Brewer, and smoke a pipe. Don't bother about your nephew. He'll have to learn things for himself. It's funny, but experience can't be handed down from one generation to another. Everyone has to accumulate his own. Sit down, man. We all have our troubles." He sighed as he remembered his troubles.

Mr. Brewer looked at him resentfully. "I don't see what troubles you have, free and independent. If any man can do as he pleases, you're the man. Who have you to worry over?"

"He has me!" Williamina told him, and she went close to William as if to remind him that he had her.

"H-m," rumbled Mr. Brewer. "You aren't a nephew!" Which even to Williamina did not

seem to be a very sensible remark. Anyone could see that she wasn't a nephew.

Mr. Brewer's only nephew was at that very moment regarding his doctor with embarrassing admiration, for the doctor had come, as he had told Marietta he would, and even Bobby Brown's careless eye could see that he had taken unusual pains with his appearance.

"Well, well," Bobby had exclaimed. "If here isn't a very glass of fashion! You never bought that tie in Mifflin, old man, or you have deceived me."

The doctor never told him where he had bought his tie, but was more professional than ever. When Bobby continued to admire him he said quietly:

"Our patient is too full of energy, Nurse Butters. Cut his rations in two."

Bobby groaned. "Double them, you mean! Double them! Would you starve a helpless man?"

"You wouldn't be the worse for a little starving. These young ladies have fed you entirely too well." The doctor turned from his patient to Helen, who was sitting on the steps. "May I speak to you alone, Miss Spafford?" he said directly.

Helen flushed and opened her eyes wide in sur-

prise, but she rose at once, and as they walked away, the yellow dog at their heels, Bobby's eyes followed them discontentedly. Why couldn't he get up on his feet and saunter by the river with a pretty girl? When they were out of sight and his envious eyes could follow them no longer, he turned his head restlessly and found himself looking into Marietta's brown eyes. A strange sensation, like nothing he had ever experienced, enveloped him. He felt as if he were drowning. He gasped foolishly as he stared at her. It seemed as if he were looking at her for the first time. He stared at her until her face turned as red as his, and murmuring something she ran away like a little coward, while his eyes followed her now, and even after she was out of his sight his thoughts followed her.

Dr. Grey lost no time in uselessly beating about any bush, and they were scarcely out of sight of the porch and of Bobby's jealous eyes before he asked quickly: "I should like to know what you think of me?"

Helen stopped and all but fell over the yellow dog as he rubbed against her. The color flooded her face as she stammered: "Why—why—" How could she tell him what she thought of him?

The doctor knit his brows in a deeper frown. "I want to know," he went on hurriedly, as the

yellow dog rubbed against him, "because I think such a lot of you. I can't get you out of my mind. You've interfered with my work. Yes, you have!" he insisted, and the frown was the deepest it had ever been. "You've filled my thoughts so completely there's no room for fevers or broken bones. I love you, Helen." He reached out and took her hands and held them close.

The touch of his fingers sent a thrill like fire through her. It opened a new world. She felt it in every nerve. It sang in her ears and made music in her heart.

"I—I want you to marry me!" The doctor's voice trembled as he told her what he wanted, and the little stumble in the voice that had always been so confident and firm went right to Helen's heart.

But she could not tell him she would marry him. There was too large a lump in her throat. It prevented her from telling him anything, but the joy of hearing that he cared for her made her cling to his hands until the lump slipped away and she could whisper that she cared, too, as she had never cared for any man. You never would have known, as she whispered how much she cared, that she had ever fancied that she was in love with William Kirwin.

The doctor's frown disappeared behind a won-

derfully beautiful smile as his hands slipped from her fingers to gather her into his arms.

"And you'll give up your gay, independent life in Waloo to come here to me?" His voice was full of awe as if he could not believe that any girl would give so much for so little.

Helen's laugh was almost hysterical as she recalled her life in Waloo. "I'll give up the independence gladly," she promised with a choke. "But as for the gayety, I never had any. Oh!" in a burst of honesty, which made him hold her closer, "it will be so good to have some one interested in me again, to really care what I'm doing. I've been lonely as well as independent. Williamina's right, if you give you'll get," she smiled through misty eyes, "I'll have you instead of that lonely independence."

"A poor country doctor!" He reminded her what she would have in him as he kissed her again.

"Country doctor," she repeated, for she remembered what Mrs. Wilson had said of this same country doctor. "A hero, you mean, with your skillful hands, your clever brain and your big, generous heart. I'm proud of my country doctor and of the work he does! I'll be so happy and grateful for the chance to make a home for him out of his big, square, white house," she confessed with tears in her eyes.

He kissed them away, although there was a mist over his own blue eyes which she had always seen so keen and searching. "I don't suppose I've had a home since my mother died," he murmured, and he seemed mighty well pleased at the thought of having a home again.

"No more have I," whispered Helen, who had wanted a home more than she had wanted anything in this big wide world. "It will be Heaven! I suppose," she confessed honestly, "that there will be times when I shall hate your little town."

"There are times when I loathe it!" He could confess, too, as his cheek rested against hers. "But on the whole it's a pretty good little town. It will be good to us if we'll be good to it."

CHAPTER XXII

THE next morning when Mr. Brewer came to ask his only nephew, as he did every day now, whether he wouldn't be a man and come away before he was married by one of those girls, Bobby looked up at him and said soberly, not at all flippantly as he had spoken before:

"I shall be a proud and happy man, Uncle George, when *one* of them does marry me, *the* one."

And Uncle George, who could recognize real feeling when he heard it, groaned. The groan was so deep and so hollow that it seemed to come from his white shoes.

"I'll bet it's that impertinent red-headed minx!" he exclaimed in disgust.

Bobby smiled, a wonderful smile which should have taught his woman-hating uncle something. "It is, Uncle George. And if she only cares for me I'll be the happiest man in the world!"

"For how long?" snarled Uncle George. "I'd rather be comfortable forty years than be what

you call happy for forty minutes and miserable the rest of my life. And that's a generous time allowance in these days when every marriage certificate seems to have a divorce coupon attached to it."

Bobby looked at him, at his frowning face with the deep discontented wrinkles and the tired, discontented eyes. "Poor old Uncle George!" he said. "Marietta and I'll be mighty good to you."

"Oh, damn!" muttered poor old Uncle George, who didn't want goodness from any woman. "Once for all, will you come with me while you can?"

"It's too late now. I expect it was too late the minute I heard her laugh. You've heard her, Uncle George. Hasn't she the dearest giggle in the world? It makes a fellow laugh with her." And Bobby smiled as he remembered Marietta's jolly chuckle.

It had never made Uncle George wish to laugh with her. He couldn't find anything infectious in any girl's laugh, and he went to complain to William and to mutter some more about a writ of habeas corpus.

"His mind's not sound, William," he said furiously. "That girl has him so befuddled he doesn't know what he's doing, and he won't listen to me,

the nearest relative he has in the world. He won't listen to me!"

William wouldn't listen to him, either, for William had his own troubles which were far more serious than Mr. Brewer's grumbles. Hunter Olney had come back in a big seven-passenger touring car, with a liveried chauffeur for which there was no place in William's shack nor in William's scheme of life.

"I was wrong, Bill," Hunter handsomely admitted as soon as he saw William, and it was not often that Hunter Olney had a chance to admit that he was wrong. "Mrs. Benham isn't Williamina's mother. I was sure she was, but it seems her kid was a boy. Funny I should make that mistake. But she'll take Williamina and adopt her if she finds the girl as attractive as I said she was. So that's just the same!" And he clapped William on the back and waited for William to burst into a loud paean of thanks.

But William did nothing of the kind. He stared at Hunter and his nice brown leather face turned white. He glanced hurriedly around for Williamina as if he were afraid that Hunter Olney would have her adopted on the minute and on the spot.

"Adopt her," he repeated in a strangled voice. "Hunt, how dare you?" he went on more hotly

when he was rid of the cramped feeling in his throat. "No one can adopt Williamina! She belongs to me!"

"Yes, I suppose she does in a way," Hunter magnanimously admitted. "But Mrs. Benham'll be glad to have her, and she'll make a splendid mother for any little motherless kid. She has slathers of money, and her family—well, even you must know who the Benhams are. It's a great chance, I can tell you, and it's all due to the way I put it. She wouldn't take any friendless, homeless little waif!" And he seemed to swell and wait for a paean of thanks again.

"Homeless! Friendless!" William fairly shouted the words. He lost his temper completely and glared at his old friend. "Williamina isn't homeless and friendless!" he stormed.

"No, of course she isn't in a way." Hunter spoke soothingly. "She has good friends, splendid friends in you and me. Mrs. Benham will be a friend, too. You'll be able to see her often. Mrs. Benham understands. I put the situation to her very clearly. The way I have it figured out, Bill," he went on as William stood before him speechless with anger, "is to let Mrs. Benham take the kid and then you can come and live with me until you want to carry out other plans," with a sly significance which slipped by William com-

CHAPTER XXIII

BOBBY BROWN had made a searching examination of his heart, and in every nook and corner of it he found Marietta. He was surprised and awed. How had Marietta slipped into his heart and made herself so much at home without his knowledge? His thoughts ran back over the days until he heard again Marietta's infectious little giggle outside of his door. He had not seen her then. And now—the very thought of her made his blood run faster, sent a flame to the tip of every nerve and filled him with a hungry desire to make her happier than any girl ever had been, than any girl ever would be. He wished he were better, cleverer, richer, all because Marietta should have the best. She gave him a dual personality, that of the crawliest worm that ever crawled in the mud and that of the mightiest king who ever slew the dragons and giants that came between him and his heart's desire. Bobby ached to slay dragons and giants and make himself worthy of the redheaded girl with the twinkle in her eyes. He knew that he

could climb to any height with Marietta by his side; he had nothing to fear and Heaven to find.

It was not his custom to let much water run under any bridge before thought became action. He had never waited for anything in his life, and he did not know how to wait now. He simply had to tell Marietta that he had found her in every nook and corner of his heart the first moment that he would see her. It was intensely irritating then to see old Uncle George in his white clothes come around the corner of the house just as he was settled on the old sofa and drop into a chair beside him as if he were there for the morning.

Bobby groaned and suggested a dozen things, any one of which would have removed his uncle a mile from the sofa but Mr. Brewer only yawned and refused to be moved an inch. He had come to protect his only nephew from feminine wiles, and a man cannot afford effective protection a mile from the object to be protected.

Nurse Butters fussed about her patient, and Helen was out and in a dozen times with a face that made the bright sun seem dim and tarnished. But Marietta never came near. Bobby grew more and more impatient. Why didn't she come? And why wouldn't old Uncle George take his white linen clothes away from old Mr. Knox's

pletely. "It will be like old times. I've missed you like thunder!"

There was something of the old boyish Hunter in the cereal king then, and William, much against his will, felt his anger oozing from him. He couldn't be angry with old Hunt when old Hunt was trying so hard to recall the happy days of long ago, but he could shake his head.

"You don't understand, Hunt. Why, I would sooner lose my right hand than lose Williamina. She—she gave me back myself, my real self. You don't know what I went through before I found her. I can't give her up! I shan't!" His mouth shut with a snap.

Hunter looked at him and astonished amazement appeared on his face. "Why!" he gasped, "I do believe you keep her because you want to!" He would never have thought of that if he had not seen it in William's eyes and heard it in William's voice.

"Want her!" cried William, wondering how on earth Hunt had managed to make the world think he was a financial wonder when he was obviously so stupid about simple things. "I couldn't live without her!"

Hunter never hesitated. The ability to shift his thoughts suddenly and bow to the inevitable

was perhaps one reason why he had become a breakfast-food king.

"Well, if that's the way you feel, you bring the kid right to my house. It's big enough. Lord, I should think it was!" as he visualized his big empty house, in which was room for a dozen Williaminas. "I don't know but it will be some sport to have a youngster around at Christmas and on the Fourth of July and circus days." He laughed as he remembered the sport he had had on a recent circus day. "You'll both come and live with me until you're married, and then perhaps I'll keep the kid, as long as you don't want Mrs. Benham to have her."

"Married!" William stared at him. "What makes you think I'm going to be married?"

"You told me—" began Hunter. "I mean," he corrected himself as he saw the amazement in William's face, "you told me about that black-haired Helen girl, and I can put two and two together as well as the next man. I could see you were dead in love with her!"

"With Helen Spafford!" gasped William.

"Yep!" nodded Hunter. "And I did my best to help you out, old chap. That was the reason why I was so anxious to find Williamina a mother. I thought perhaps Miss Spafford might object to her."

But William did not let him say any more. He put his hands on Hunter's shoulders and shook him.

"You old fool!" he shouted when he could stop laughing and shout. "Why, Helen Spafford is going to marry the doctor! You are right, though, I am in love, but not with Helen," he said more soberly.

"With whom then?" Hunter wanted to know as he shook himself free. He didn't see how he could have been mistaken, but there was truth in William's eyes. He had to believe him when he said he was not in love with Helen Spafford.

"With little Bill!" And William's eyes shone.

"Oh!" Hunter drew a quick breath. "Sure?" And as William insisted that he was very sure, he went on: "Then you'll both come to me. Yes," as William shook his head. "Why, Bill, you are all the brother I ever had."

"And you are all the brother I ever had," William said kindly. "But Bill and I won't live with you."

"Why not?" Hunter was offended and showed it.

"You're—you're too damned efficient!" William answered ruefully.

"W-what!" Hunter recoiled in horror. How could anyone be too efficient in these efficient

days? No wonder he stuttered as he asked what in thunder William meant.

"Just what I said. You'd have me with a wife and Bill with a mother just because the majority of men over forty-five have wives and most kids of ten have mothers. The fact that we don't want a wife nor a mother wouldn't make any difference to you, now would it?"

"Well," stammered Hunter from the corner in which William had driven him, "I'd be doing it for your good."

"Our good!" jeered William. "How many crimes are committed in those words! It won't do, Hunt. I'll be glad to see you whenever you'll take the time to look me up, but Bill and I'll live here by ourselves."

Hunter was still protesting and explaining when Williamina ran up to them.

"Mr. Brown took four steps this morning on his own legs," she announced with the importance due the bearer of such tidings. "And tomorrow he's going to take eight. He said he had to take a lot of steps if he wanted to get his heart's desire. What do you suppose he means?"

"Never mind Brown's heart's desire," Hunter said impatiently. "You come here and tell William you want to go to Waloo to live."

"William knows," she answered quickly. "I explained that to him a long time ago."

William took her face between his hands. "You don't really want to go to Waloo, Bill," he said. "You've been bewitched!"

"Have I?" She was doubtful. "I don't think I have really, William, dear, only Waloo's so wonderful and so full of such splendid people."

"But your friends are here," William reminded her. "Mrs. Macartney——"

"Mrs. Macartney won't be here long. As soon as she can find some one to take her chickens off of her hands she'll go to Waloo, too. Her brother's wife has died, and he wants her to come and keep house for him and let Dave go to a real school and fit himself for something worth while." She was evidently quoting Mrs. Macartney's brother. "Mrs. Macartney said she didn't know but her duty to Dave and her brother was bigger than her duty to her chickens."

"To be sure it is," chuckled Hunter. "So she wants to sell her chicken farm, does she? Glad of it. She's too nice a little woman to play nurse maid to a lot of chickens. That type's getting rarer every day, Bill, and it's up to us to see it isn't taken advantage of. I'll tell Gadsden. He's one of my men who has had a nervous breakdown and been ordered to the country. He told me he

wouldn't mind so much if he could raise chickens. He's always wanted to raise chickens. That's why he went in for breakfast food. It was as near as he could get," he laughed. "He's saved something and I expect he'll buy this farm and business like a shot when I tell him about it. See if he doesn't."

To William's ears the bargain seemed as good as made, the Macartneys were the same as moved to Waloo.

"And there's old Danny Simms," he went on. "Who would look after him next winter?"

"Now, Bill, you can't think a broken-down old fisherman is a fit playfellow for a little girl," objected Hunter. "Be reasonable, old man, be reasonable."

"He won't be here," piped Williamina. "He told me just now that he was going to his brother in Riverview as soon as Jack Frost came. And Mr. Brewer always goes south, you know."

"And those girls won't stay in their cottage. You'll be left here alone, Bill, and you won't like it now. You'll be lonelier than you ever were. Say you'll come with me?" begged Hunter.

But William wouldn't say it. He couldn't say it.

"He's stubborn as a mule," Hunter told them at old Mr. Knox's cottage. "He won't listen to a word of reason."

"But he can't stay here alone with Williamina all winter," exclaimed Helen. "It's the logical thing for them to go to Waloo."

"Do you know what I think?" Marietta spoke from behind Bobby's sofa, where Bobby could not see her. There was a light in Bobby's eyes when he did see her that made Marietta quiver and flush. It made her restless and uncomfortable, and so she kept out of his sight as much as she could. "I believe that William is afraid. He's been here so long, out of the world, that he is afraid to go back." Marietta had not swerved an iota from her original diagnosis of William's case.

"By thunder!" Hunter slapped his knee and eyed her with admiration. "What a brain you have, Miss Marietta. You should be in the breakfast-food business. I believe on my soul that you are right. The dear old chap's afraid that he won't hold his own. But he will. Think what he can do with those dyes! And that toy! Just let him smell powder and he'll wonder how he ever stayed here. He's got it in him. I shouldn't insist if I didn't know that. But I knew him in the old days, and I knew his father and his grandfather. He can't help but make good. But how in the dickens," he looked around helplessly, "are we going to get him to consent to move?"

That was the question. William was not a

child to be moved hither and yon as another person said. He was a man with rights and wishes of his own. And he stated emphatically that it was his wish to remain with Williamina in the shack by the river. No wonder Hunter sighed and blew his nose with trumpet loudness.

"Williamina is the only one who can really influence him," suggested Helen, as she remembered the days when she had tried to influence William.

"Yes, if I could get Williamina to Waloo, Bill would soon follow her. He's wild about her. It's pathetic to hear him talk. She is a nice little thing if she would leave those confounded rabbits and cats alone. By thunder! I'll tell you!" He jumped to his feet and looked down at them with kindling eyes as the idea which had flashed to his brain took form. "I'll kidnap the kid! I'll take her to Waloo and send old Bill word that if he wants her he must come after her. He'll come then, like a shot! You'll see!"

CHAPTER XXIII

BOBBY BROWN had made a searching examination of his heart, and in every nook and corner of it he found Marietta. He was surprised and awed. How had Marietta slipped into his heart and made herself so much at home without his knowledge? His thoughts ran back over the days until he heard again Marietta's infectious little giggle outside of his door. He had not seen her then. And now—the very thought of her made his blood run faster, sent a flame to the tip of every nerve and filled him with a hungry desire to make her happier than any girl ever had been, than any girl ever would be. He wished he were better, cleverer, richer, all because Marietta should have the best. She gave him a dual personality, that of the crawliest worm that ever crawled in the mud and that of the mightiest king who ever slew the dragons and giants that came between him and his heart's desire. Bobby ached to slay dragons and giants and make himself worthy of the redheaded girl with the twinkle in her eyes. He knew that he

could climb to any height with Marietta by his side; he had nothing to fear and Heaven to find.

It was not his custom to let much water run under any bridge before thought became action. He had never waited for anything in his life, and he did not know how to wait now. He simply had to tell Marietta that he had found her in every nook and corner of his heart the first moment that he would see her. It was intensely irritating then to see old Uncle George in his white clothes come around the corner of the house just as he was settled on the old sofa and drop into a chair beside him as if he were there for the morning.

Bobby groaned and suggested a dozen things, any one of which would have removed his uncle a mile from the sofa but Mr. Brewer only yawned and refused to be moved an inch. He had come to protect his only nephew from feminine wiles, and a man cannot afford effective protection a mile from the object to be protected.

Nurse Butters fussed about her patient, and Helen was out and in a dozen times with a face that made the bright sun seem dim and tarnished. But Marietta never came near. Bobby grew more and more impatient. Why didn't she come? And why wouldn't old Uncle George take his white linen clothes away from old Mr. Knox's

porch? Uncle George might know he was not wanted there. Bobby had made it plain to him. Bobby would be hanged if he would stay around and make a holy spoil-sport of himself for anybody.

At last Marietta came with the Waloo paper, which the rural postman had left at the gate. She demurely offered it to Mr. Brewer, with a subdued greeting but Mr. Brewer only grunted that his own Waloo paper was in his pocket, so she carried it to Bobby. Marietta was particularly adorable that morning in a white skirt and pale green smock which made her look about sixteen. She had twisted her hair low on her neck and a soft red-brown mist framed her face. There was a hint of shyness in her brown eyes which Bobby had never seen there. It went to his head like wine, and instead of taking the Waloo paper she offered him, he took her five brown fingers.

"Marietta," he said, and his voice was husky and breathless, so different from his usual lazy drawl that she looked at him expectantly. "I don't care if Uncle George is here, I can't wait another second to tell you I'm crazy about you. I couldn't sleep all last night I was so busy thinking what a perfect darling you are. You're—you're—" He stuttered as he tried to tell her what she was and clung to the five brown fingers

which Marietta endeavored to pull from him as she sent a horrified glance at Mr. Brewer.

It was as nothing to the horrified glance that Mr. Brewer sent her and on to Bobby. Mr. Brewer half rose from his chair and his face turned many shades of purple. "My God!" he muttered, uncertain what to do next in such a horrible crisis.

Bobby paid no more attention to his uncle than he would have given to a profane parrot hanging in a cage above his head. He held Marietta's hand tighter; her fingers would feel his pressure for hours and hours.

"Do you understand, Marietta, darling?" He went on in that husky breathless voice, as if he were afraid his Uncle George might interrupt him. "I'm crazy about you! I never knew a fellow could care for a girl as I care for you. Why, it's changed the world for me. I want to be everything, do everything just for you. You've made me feel so full of ambition that I'll—I'll—I don't know what I'll do if you won't let me work for you and love you for the rest of my life! And I hope it will be a thundering long life!"

"My God!" muttered Mr. Brewer again, the shades of purple deepening in his face, his eyes bulging dangerously. He looked wildly about and waved his hands feebly, but Bobby paid no

more attention to him than he did to the fly that buzzed about his head.

"I suppose you think I'm a footless fool," Bobby went on more humbly than anyone ever would have imagined that he could or would speak.

At that Mr. Brewer suddenly found his long lost voice. "You aren't a fool!" He fairly shouted the words. "No nephew of mine could be a fool!"

Marietta found her voice, too, at that, a shocked indignant voice. The intense feeling in Bobby's usually lazy voice, the fire in his usually listless eyes had turned her face into first a white rose and then into a pink one, and her eyes held a softness which no topaz had ever held in its brown depths. "You're not a fool!" she said almost as hotly as Mr. Brewer. "I should say you weren't. You're the cleverest, jolliest man I know!"

"That's what I said," muttered Mr. Brewer, like a roll of low thunder. "No man with Brewer blood in his veins could be a fool."

Bobby ignored his uncle but when Marietta spoke he gave a low cry and drew her hand closer. "Then you don't hate me?" he managed to gasp almost unbelievingly.

"Hate you!" How could Marietta hate any

one, least of all an attractive young man who was flat on his back. "No, I don't hate you." She admitted it under the pressure of his fingers, the eager pleading in his face. She had known for some time that she did not hate him, but she had told no one how she did feel toward him.

That was enough for Bobby, and he would have taken more than her hand in his warm clasp if she had not pulled herself free and stepped away. That brought her face to face with an elderly man on the verge of apoplexy, and she stood still with a feeling of dismay and pity that her low exclamation did not half express. In some way she felt very sorry for this old man whose face showed a dozen shades of purple; she suddenly felt very sorry for everybody but herself and Bobby Brown, and she dared to put out her hands, which would tremble so that she was ashamed of them.

"Oh, Mr. Brewer," she said very, very softly. "You'll be the only uncle I have ever known!"

Mr. Brewer snorted loudly and glowered at her, but as he snorted and glowered he caught his breath. There was that in her pink rose face and in her topaz brown eyes that made his anger and disgust slip from him. He let her take his hands, he even let her cling to them, he even found himself saying gruffly:

"Well, as long as he has to marry a girl I suppose you'll do as well as any. Better," he went on in a more confident tone, as he felt her fingers cling to his, "than that Spafford girl. She'd let him do as he pleased, but I reckon you've enough spunk to keep him up to a mark."

"I wasn't meant for a door mat," Marietta agreed with him, and her shaky little laugh was like music in the ears of one man. "I—I think I was made for a prod."

Mr. Brewer must have liked prods better than he did door mats for he nodded his head gravely six times before he said sharply, as if he had just made an important discovery: "Well, I reckon there's not much use hanging around here any more. The fat's all in the fire as far as I can see. George!" the name was like the report of a pistol, "I'll move you down home tomorrow. The doctor said you could come."

"All right, Uncle George." Bobby never looked at him, he was so busy looking at Marietta, and with a seventh shake of his head Uncle George stumbled away without a glance backward, and if he was sorry that he had not gone earlier you never would have guessed it from the proud carriage of his straight old back.

"It's a long way," grumbled Bobby, when the

tail of his uncle's coat had disappeared around the tangle of bridal wreath.

"What is?" Marietta was looking after Uncle George, at the bridal wreath, at anything rather than at Bobby Brown.

"Uncle George's house."

"Poof! It's only a mile."

"I don't want even a mile to be between you and me!" Bobby's voice was decisive, it was the voice he might have used in discussing contracts. "Do you, Marietta, honey?" It changed completely and became soft and wooing. "Do you? If I could stand on my two feet there wouldn't be six inches. You better believe you wouldn't be over there by yourself!"

"Where would I be?" asked Marietta with a tantalizing smile and never moving one inch.

"You'd be here—in my arms," Bobby said so wistfully and so softly that the words had a magic power which carried Marietta across the porch and into his eager arms.

CHAPTER XXIV

WILLIAM was ashamed of himself. Marietta had been quite right when she said that William was afraid to go back into the real world, and it was because he felt that he was afraid that he was ashamed. He had been contented and happy with his life here on the river bank with Williamina until this summer. He had never thought of any other. He would not admit, even to himself, that he was not satisfied now, but down in the deepest, darkest corner of his mind he knew that his friendship with Helen and Marietta, his talks with Bobby Brown, and most of all his renewal of the old relations with Hunter Olney had made him restless and uneasy. And what was the strongest element in making him restless and uneasy was Williamina.

In season and out of season Helen and Marietta and even Nurse Butters had impressed him with what Mrs. Macartney had told him until she learned better than to speak of it at all, that it was not fair to Williamina to keep her in a lonely river shack any longer. Some day she

would have to find her way out into the big world, and if he kept her here she would go crippled through the lack of association with other people, with those of her own generation, which she could not get here. It is generally admitted that education now means as much a knowledge of people as of books and how was Williamina to receive an all round education when she would only know William, Louis the cook, the rural postman, the milkman and Mr. Smith-an'-Wobbler? When Mrs. Macartney took Dave away there would be no one left of Williamina's generation. William had to admit that, to admit also that Williamina, to be the woman he wished her to be, must have something that he alone could not give her. He jealously resented the fact that he was not in himself a city of ten thousand inhabitants at least, but he was not even a town of ten hundred. He was only one puzzled, jealous, middle-aged man.

He frowned and muttered to himself as he tramped the dusty road. He had slipped away by himself to thrash out the question which his friends would not let him thrust away unanswered. He knew that as long as Williamina lived those who heard her story would try and place her in this family or that, but, thank God, that need not bother him now, and he felt for a folded

paper in his pocket and touched it with much satisfaction.

There really was no reason why he shouldn't take Williamina to Waloo as old Hunt suggested. There would be money enough. Hunter had convinced him that there was a fortune in his "rainbow" and another in the Sniglefritz, but if he threw himself into business as a business man has to throw himself today, his intimate knowledge of Williamina would cease. He would not know every thought in that yellow-topped head, and much as William thought he might enjoy a contact with the active world again he wanted more to keep in close touch with the little girl who had given him back his sanity.

"I wasn't anything but a morbid fool when I found her," he told himself honestly. And as he owed her his sanity, didn't he owe her more, a different kind of a debt? If he gave her what was her right, the chance to associate with her own generation, he must go himself where her generation was or consent to a separation.

He came to a turn in the road where Williamina had found a stray dog which she had forced on a wondering tramp, and he smiled before he frowned as he remembered Williamina's strong belief in her creed—if you want to get you have to give. He recalled an old Irish proverb his

grandfather used to quote — "What will you have?" quoth God, "Pay for it and take it." If he "got," if he wanted Williamina's company, her companionship which meant more to him than anything in the world, he must give, he must pay by abandoning his selfish isolated life here. Any other way would be unfair, dishonest. Darn it all, why had these people come to let him know what he might never have realized without them? What had they given him in comparison with what they had taken? One moment he was willing to give and get and the next he pushed away all thought of any but the old existence with Williamina. He argued both sides, shifting from one to the other, as he tramped along the dusty road.

He did not come home for lunch, and Hunter grumbled loudly.

"I've a lot of stuff about his dyes to show him," he told Mrs. Macartney when he went up to the farm later to complain to her. "When he reads it he'll know he can't stay here. By George, we could have kidnapped the kid and rushed her to Waloo today if I'd known old Bill would have been out of the way. There's no use prolonging the agony, and I'm needed in Waloo right now. We'll go tomorrow."

Mrs. Macartney nodded her approval. "I

think myself the sooner it is decided the better. We shall miss William," she sighed, and as Hunter looked up at her from the steps in which he sat, she added with a sudden and most surprising blush, "and Williamina."

"You won't miss them long." Hunter stared at her in a most disconcerting manner. "You're coming to Waloo yourself the end of the month. Gadsden wants to take possession at once." For Mr. Gadsden had been glad to buy Mrs. Macartney's chicken farm which Mrs. Macartney was so glad to sell to him. "It isn't as if you were going to lose them. You aren't even going to lose me," he said so boyishly that she smiled.

"I hope not. It is not so easy to make friends at my age. I want to keep all those I have."

"Your age!" scornfully. "I guess you'll never be too old to make friends wherever you go. Why a month ago I didn't know you existed and you didn't know I existed and yet here we are warm friends. Aren't we?" he demanded and again there was something so boyish in his manner that she had to laugh as the color crept into her cheeks and up to her brown-gray hair for no reason at all.

"I hope so," was all she said, but there was a warmth in her voice that encouraged Hunter to go on.

"You know I admire you enormously. There's something in the way you took hold of this chicken farm when you hated it so and made a success of it that appeals to me. You didn't whine because you were not getting any more rights, you just buckled down to earning your living. You know I haven't much use for the new woman, she's so darned," he hesitated for the word, "intrusive!" he blurted out. "I'm not as bad as old Brewer, but I like women to stay where they belong."

She refused to be drawn into any argument on where women might belong. She hated to argue as much as she hated to manage a chicken farm. "It was William who made this place a success," she said. "I didn't——"

"Oh, hang Bill!" he interrupted impatiently. "To hear you talk you'd think Bill had made over the world."

"That's just what he did, this part of it," she told him quickly.

"Then the sooner he goes to a place where he isn't regarded as a little god the better. What old Bill needs to put the old red blood back in his veins is a little competition. He'll get that in Waloo. Lord, I should think he would!" He grinned as he thought of the competition which awaited William in Waloo.

"He can meet it," Mrs. Macartney said proudly.

Hunter looked up quickly. "Say," he said with the bluntness which was so characteristic, "What's Bill to you? It isn't any of my business, but if you'd tell me I'd be much obliged."

She told him at once. There was no reason why she shouldn't. "He's my very good friend."

"Oh!" he laughed oddly. "That's all right. I hope I'm your good friend, too. No, I don't either!" he contradicted himself sharply. "See here," he went on, and this time it was he who blushed away up to the whisps of his gray hair. "You'll think I'm a fool, and perhaps I am, but old Bill has taught me that certain kinds of fools get far more out of life than wise men. I've never had time for women. I've been too busy. The nearest thing was that Mrs. Benham who was willing to take Williamina, but it wasn't anything but a passing fancy. I've had time since I've been down here to see you in a different way from the way I've seen other women, and I like you. Is there any reason why we shouldn't be married?" He stated his position and put his question as he would have stated any business proposition.

"Why, Mr. Olney!" she gasped. She was so surprised she could do nothing but gasp.

"There's—there's Dave!" She managed to find a reason.

"Dave's a reason why we should be married," he said firmly. "Every boy needs a man to help bring him up."

"I've had William," she said resentfully, as if she thought he was finding fault with Dave's bringing up.

"Oh, let Bill drop!" He was impatient. "Bill's all right in his place, but his place isn't between you and me. Now is it?"

It wasn't, and she was honest enough to tell him so. She told him also that she might marry him some day, if Dave didn't object.

"I'll manage Dave," boasted Hunter who had managed so many men and boys that he was confident that he could manage this boy. Without waiting to prove his words he put his arms around Mrs. Macartney and kissed her as ardently as any lover ever kissed a sweetheart.

"Good Lord!" He held her off and looked into her flushed face. "Why didn't Williamina pick me out of the bulrushes ten years ago? You'll come to Waloo tomorrow with me and the kid? We'll leave in time to get there so we can phone Bill before the afternoon train leaves Mifflin. I don't want to scare Bill but just jar him

out of his rut here. Perhaps we could go today!" He pulled his watch from his pocket. He was eager to give William that jar and get the matter settled now that this other matter had been so satisfactorily arranged. "What do you say?"

CHAPTER XV

IT was almost supper time before William came home, a very tired, white-faced and dusty William. He found the shack empty. Not even Louis was there. It gave William a strange dreary feeling to go through the rooms; this was the way they would be if he stayed at home and did his duty by Williamina and sent her away. But she hadn't been sent away yet, he thought quickly. She was up at Mrs. Macartney's. He would run up and bring her back.

But Williamina was not at Mrs. Macartney's. Neither was Mrs. Macartney there, nor Dave. Jacob Schwartz was in the chicken yard and offered the information that Mr. Olney had taken them off in his big touring car.

"Your kid was with them. I guess they was goin' for a good long ride. Say, Mr. Kirwin, do you suppose I'm goin' to like the new boss?" Jacob was more interested in what concerned him than in what concerned William.

William's mind being relieved as to Williamina's whereabouts he could talk to Jacob about

his new boss, but when he left the farm his uneasiness returned. What did Jacob mean by a good long ride? Where had Hunt taken them? Hunter had given all of them several long rides since he had brought his touring car down, but for some reason William felt uncomfortable about this ride. Well, he couldn't run after a high-powered touring car. All he could do would be to go home and wait. First he would drop in at old Mr. Knox's cottage. Perhaps there would be some one there who could tell him about the good long ride on which Hunt had taken Williamina and incidentally Dave and Mrs. Macartney.

It was a great relief to see the big touring car, the chauffeur slouched down asleep behind the wheel, standing outside the gate of old Mr. Knox's cottage, and he hurried in to find them all on the porch, Mrs. Macartney, Williamina, Dave and Hunter with Mr. Brewer not quite so aloof as usual. Even the yellow dog that refused to become a prince was there. Every eye was watching Bobby show what he could do without his crutches. Williamina saw William first and flew to him.

"Oh, William, darling," she cried. "Where have you been? It seems a hundred thousand years since you went away! You can't guess what has happened. Mr. Olney is going to be

Dave's truly father, just as I told him he could. And Mr. Brown's walked all down this porch on his own two legs. Did you know he was Marietta's prince?" she whispered in his ear.

William had not known but his congratulations were very hearty as he took first Marietta's brown hand and then Bobby Brown's white hand, smiling all the time at Hunter and Mrs. Macartney. And after he had spoken to them he went to Mr. Brewer.

"I reckon you're to be congratulated, too, Mr. Brewer," he said heartily.

But Mr. Brewer would not admit that he was to be congratulated just because a despised woman was to enter his family.

"Maybe, maybe," he was heard to mutter. "It's early to say yet. But as I told the boy if he must marry a girl why Marietta'll do as well as any."

"You said she would do better!" reminded Bobby. "You know you did!"

"Yes, Uncle George," Marietta echoed saucily. "You did say better."

A sudden smile broke over Mr. Brewer's frowning face, like the sun on a cloudy day. "Well, perhaps I did," he growled, but there was actually a twinkle in his eyes, and he really patted the hand which Marietta took from Bobby to put

on his arm to remind him that he had said she was better than anyone.

"Dear me," murmured Williamina in a grandmotherly way as she looked from one to the other of the little group, "I found my doctor for Miss Helen, to help her grow lettuces. He has splendid ones in his own garden, Miss Helen," with a nod to let Helen know that she need not worry over a garden another minute. "And I gave Mr. Brown to Marietta. And I gave Mr. Olney to Dave and Mrs. Macartney. But I haven't found any one for Nurse Butters." She looked about and her eyes fell on Mr. Brewer.

He jumped, yes, jumped, and turned pale. "God help me!" Marietta heard him murmur.

"Nor for Mr. Brewer," went on Williamina slowly.

"You leave well enough alone when it comes to me, Bill!" Mr. Brewer told her hastily, and Marietta kindly showed him the advantages to be derived from having a niece by speaking hastily, also.

"You've given me to Mr. Brewer, too, you know, Williamina. I'm going to be his only niece."

"So I have!" And Williamina beamed on Mr. Brewer, well pleased with her gift to him.

"And as for me," Nurse Butters' smile was as

broad as her broad face would permit, which was very broad, indeed, "you've given me all these friends."

"You bet she's given me to you for a friend!" Gratitude fairly oozed from Bobby Brown.

"Me, too!" echoed Marietta with a hearty appreciation of what Nurse Butters had done for her fiancé.

"I expect they'll all come to your funeral." Williamina nodded again, well pleased with what she had given Nurse Butters although Nurse Butters had sadly disappointed her. Nurse Butters had never once burst out of her white uniform although she had just the same as promised to burst. "But there's William, the one I love best in all the world! I haven't given him anything! And nobody's given me anything," she reminded them in a wail. "I've given and given! You know I have and what have I got?" Her lip quivered.

They looked at each other guiltily. It was true. What had they given Williamina?

"I tried to give you something, Williamina," reminded Hunter. "I tried to give you a mother."

"So did I!" There was a general chorus. Each of them had tried to give Williamina a mother.

Williamina's lip stopped quivering so that it could curl. "A mother!" she said with all the old scorn. "What do I want with a mother?"

"What do you want, Williamina?" Hunter asked, and the hand in his pocket produced a jingling sound as if it would tell Williamina that it could give her anything she would name.

Williamina hesitated as her blue eyes looked from one to the other. A fierce, jealous longing rose up in her stout little heart and found voice.

"I want to belong!" she cried stormily. "I want to really and truly belong! All of you belong to somebody," she told them. "There's only me who doesn't belong anywhere. And everybody should belong to somebody. I want to really and truly belong!"

William's face turned white and the arm he had put around Williamina dropped to his side. "To whom do you want to belong, Bill?" he asked in a voice that was not a bit like his ordinary voice.

She looked at him in surprise. "Why, to you," she said as if she could not understand why he should have asked her. "I want to belong to you really and truly, William, dear!" And she hid her face against his sleeve.

He gave a funny little cry, and his arms closed around her. "It's a strange thing, Bill, honey,"

He gave a funny little cry and his arms closed around her.

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he said and there was a series of shakes in his voice, "but I had that same feeling the other day. I want to belong really and truly to you. And so I went to a lawyer I know in Mifflin, and he gave me a paper," he released one arm to take the paper from his pocket, "to show that the law says that now we really and truly belong to each other for ever and ever.

"O-o-oh!" Williamina lifted a face all pink and teary to see if that could be true, and a timid finger just touched the magic paper to feel if it was real. "Then I belong to you for ever and ever?" She was afraid it couldn't be true in spite of the magic paper.

He hugged her. "And I belong to you! I wanted to have it all fixed before we went to Waloo," he added.

She shrieked at that and the tears disappeared leaving only the pink flush on her radiant face. "Are we going to Waloo, William, dear? To Waloo!" she repeated in awe, for Waloo was a magic city to her.

"Good old Bill!" Hunter reached forth an approving hand. "You'll never be sorry, old man."

"That remains to be seen," answered William. "But you'd never believe why I'm going," he

added with a grin. He knew Hunt couldn't believe in his reason nor understand it.

"Oh!" Williamina dancing around danced right on Mr. Brewer's toes, and Mr. Brewer never said a word, he only drew his toes in under his chair. "Then it's true what you told me! It's true!"

"What's true, Bill? What did I tell you?" William asked the questions just to have her turn her flower face to him.

She did more than that, she ran to him. "When Mr. Olney went to Waloo to get me a mother," she said as if mothers were to be had like hats or shoes, at any shop, "I was afraid, and I spent my wish. Yes, I did, William, I spent my only wish. I just had to. I was so afraid!" She shivered as she remembered how afraid she had been.

"What for, Bill, honey?" William's voice was very gentle and very tender. He knew what spending her only wish had meant to Williamina.

She freed herself and straightened her slim shoulders, lifting her head proudly. "I wished," she said in her clear voice which was not a bit like Mrs. Macartney's and never would be, "I wished that William and I should always love each other and really belong to each other and live together happily forever and a day. And

then," she added solemnly, for she had felt that the occasion of spending the only wish with which she had been sent into the world had been a solemn one, "I said 'Amen!' "

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